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Mr Malcolm Shaw
Headteacher
The Willows School Academy Trust
Stipularis Drive
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Middlesex
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Dear Mr Shaw

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Willows School Academy Trust

Following my visit to The Willows School Academy on 18 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body, together with a parent governor and with a senior leader from a local secondary school who is currently providing support to the school. The school's post-Ofsted action plan was evaluated. The school's record of checks made on new staff was examined. A telephone conversation was held with the Director of Children's Service for Hillingdon. I joined the headteacher on a tour of the school and checked the changes made to the site since the last inspection.

Context

Some staff have left the school since the last inspection. This includes the deputy headteacher and three other teachers who all held posts of responsibility. Some

support staff have also left. A class teacher has been appointed and has immediately taken up her post. Another teacher will start in two weeks and will be responsible for improving literacy and numeracy throughout the school. Two more teachers are employed on a temporary basis while further recruitment takes place. The headteacher receives leadership support for two days a week from a senior leader seconded from a local secondary school, who is helping to address the improvement areas identified in the inspection report and providing advice and support to the governing body. Governors are currently considering entering into a formal trust agreement with this school. The learning support unit has been closed, as the school is no longer able to provide appropriate funding. Since the inspection, the school has had its financial situation scrutinised by the Education Funding Agency.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Following the inspection, systems for monitoring how pupils arrive at, move around, and leave the school site have been improved. A specialist company has been employed to check that the school boundaries are secure and necessary repairs have been carried out. These measures ensure that pupils are unable to leave the school site without permission and unnoticed by staff. Further changes to classroom locations and how rooms are used have been made. The layout of the school is now improved as it allows staff to monitor pupils more closely and reduces unnecessary movement. As a result, you are able to maintain order and calm around the building.

Following the section 5 inspection, a statement of action was not produced within the prescribed time scales. A post-Ofsted school action plan has been drawn up but this lacks sufficient detail and key information is missing, such as how parents will be kept informed or how their views will be considered. While correctly identifying the areas for improvement that need to be addressed, the timescales for making improvements are not clear and there are no milestones to allow progress to be measured at regular intervals. It is not clear how the school will ensure that the time and resources needed to carry out the actions identified in the plan will be available. This is because no thought has been given to how long the actions will take or by when they will need to be completed. A further concern is that the same people carrying out the actions are also checking how effective they have been. This will prevent any further improvements being identified and will limit how leaders and governors can hold staff to account. Accurate monitoring will not be possible as there are no clear measures against which progress can be checked. This includes how the actions taken will lead to improvements in pupils' achievement.

Despite the inspection report recommending that an external review of governance is carried out, this has not yet been commissioned. While the governing body is keen to move the school forward, it does not understand its own roles and responsibilities. For example, it failed to submit a statement of action following the inspection that placed the school in special measures. Governors have been equally unaware of

statutory requirements around financial monitoring and deadlines that they are required to meet as an academy proprietor. They are not checking that the school has sufficient leadership capacity to bring about improvements within the limited time available. Neither are they seeking appropriate external help and guidance quickly enough when their own understanding is lacking. Even though they have willingly engaged with further training and are determined to make the improvements identified within the inspection report, they are not yet able to offer adequate levels of challenge and support. This is preventing the school from making the rapid improvements that are necessary.

Following my visit, I recommend that the external review of governance is carried out as soon as possible. This should seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the governing body to ensure that it can carry out its statutory responsibilities effectively. Any recommendations should be implemented without further delay. The statement of action and the school's post-Ofsted action plan should be rewritten as a matter of urgency and submitted to Ofsted by 18 November 2013.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The proprietor's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Hillingdon and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector