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5 February 2014

Mr Malcolm Shaw  
Headteacher  
The Willows School Academy Trust  
Stipularis Drive,  
Hayes  
Middlesex  
UB4 9QB

Dear Mr Shaw

**Special measures monitoring inspection of The Willows School Academy Trust**

Following my visit to your school on 4 February 2014, 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The proprietor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report 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.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2013.**

Improve the quality of teaching so that more is good or better and none is inadequate by ensuring teachers:

- set tasks at the right level for pupils
- demand more work and better presentation from them
- provide more opportunities for pupils to work actively with others.

As a priority, ensure that the site is secure and pupils are always supervised so that no pupil is able to leave unnoticed.

Involve pupils in assessing and checking their own learning by making sure:

- marking tells pupils how to improve, and pupils have the chance to take action in response to it
- targets are used better, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Improve pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy by:

- helping pupils to extend their range of vocabulary and teaching them how to structure sentences
- making sure teachers correct pupils' errors in spelling and punctuation
- ensuring that reading skills are taught systematically throughout the school
- improving teachers' mathematical knowledge, and helping pupils practise their skills by solving more real-life mathematical problems.

Improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring:

- staff consistently challenge poor behaviour before it escalates, using agreed procedures
- the topics and activities of the curriculum are more interesting and engaging.

Ensure that leaders and managers:

- have clear roles and responsibilities
- gather accurate data on pupils' progress and behaviour, and analyse it to be clear about how well different groups are doing, identify priorities and rigorously check plans are working
- assess the quality of teaching accurately, taking into account the impact teaching is having on pupils' progress, and follow up improvement points teachers are given
- base targets for teachers' performance and any pay increases on improvements in the quality of teaching.

Make sure governors use accurate data and sound evidence effectively to hold senior leaders and staff accountable for the school's performance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 February 2014.**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and the teachers responsible for assessment, literacy and numeracy. Telephone conversations were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and the School Improvement Partner. All classes were jointly observed with the headteacher. Pupils were spoken to informally throughout the visit.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection, a new deputy headteacher has taken up his post and a new Chair of the Governing Body has been elected. The nursery unit at the academy has closed. Governors have appointed a School Improvement Partner to work with academy leaders. Governors are considering joining a multi-academy trust (MAT) and discussions with possible sponsors are ongoing.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Standards of achievement remain low overall and progress across year groups and subjects is uneven. New tracking systems show that pupils are making better rates of progress in mathematics than they are in reading and writing. Older pupils are currently making less progress than pupils in Years 3 and 4. However, most pupils are making some progress from their starting points and an increasing number are making expected rates of progress in both literacy and numeracy. Progress seen in books is currently stronger in literacy than in mathematics. This is because pupils are given explicit targets to work towards which are reviewed regularly. Opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills across other subjects are not yet carefully planned or monitored. This means pupils make less progress than they could and teachers cannot judge how well they are applying the skills they have been taught. Recent initiatives to improve reading, writing and numeracy skills are at an early stage and the impact of this work has still to be seen.

Vulnerable groups, including pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding, achieve as well as other pupils. However, their progress is not being tracked carefully enough. Consequently, the impact of the pupil premium on raising the achievement of pupils who are entitled to this funding is not being accurately measured.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching at the academy has improved since the inspection. Academy monitoring records show that most teaching is now consistently good and no teaching is inadequate. This is because new teachers have high expectations and are

supporting pupils to achieve their targets. Work in books is presented carefully and displays of work in classes and around the academy are of a high standard. Consequently, pupils are proud of what they achieve because they know it is valued.

All teachers now have access to accurate assessment information which they use to set appropriate targets for pupils to work towards. They regularly measure the amount of progress each pupil is making and provide additional support when rates of progress are slow. The academy is aware that further work is needed to involve pupils in assessing their own learning against the targets they have been set. This will encourage them to improve their attitudes towards learning so they make more progress.

Teachers plan activities that take account of individual starting points and are pitched at the correct level for each pupil. Pupils know what their own learning objective is and can access appropriate levels of support in line with their needs. Learning activities are varied and provide opportunities to work individually, with others and with adult support. Pupils are being asked to solve real-life problems in mathematics that they find interesting. This improves their levels of engagement so they make better progress towards their targets.

A new marking policy has been written to ensure that errors in punctuation, spelling and grammar are corrected by teachers when they occur. However, improvements in marking still need to be more firmly embedded across the academy. Teachers are providing corrections and comments that show pupils how to improve but they do not always provide time for pupils to respond to these. This prevents some pupils from using the advice they have been given to make further improvements.

Teachers have participated in training opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy subject knowledge. This has helped them to challenge pupils to achieve more. Further training is planned to ensure that reading skills can be taught more systematically across the academy.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The academy is usually a calm and purposeful place for learning. A whole-academy approach to managing challenging behaviour is now firmly established. All adults are applying the new policy consistently. As a result, interruptions to learning are short and any outbursts are quickly de-escalated. Pupils understand that they are expected to behave well. However, they know what to do if they become upset, including where to go to calm down and find support. This allows them to return to lessons quickly to re-engage with their learning. They receive consistent and clear messages from all adults to help them achieve the social, emotional and behavioural targets they have been set. A new rewards scheme has helped to improve attitudes towards learning. This is because pupils value the chance to spend their reward points and choose further activities at the end of every week.

Detailed tracking information for every pupil identifies that most are making progress towards their behavioural targets. As a result, serious incidents and interventions which require physical restraint are few in number. Attendance rates are above average for most pupils and there have been no exclusions since September.

Pupils move around the building and use the outside play areas safely. They are appropriately supervised at all times.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The academy action plan, judged as not fit for purpose at the last monitoring inspection, has been rewritten. The new plan is now linked to the proprietor's statement of action, and monitoring roles and timescales have been included. However, the plan still fails to identify how actions will improve pupils' achievement or how governors will check that improvements have been successful. Leaders are currently working with their School Improvement Partner to improve the action plan further.

Leadership roles have been strengthened as a result of responsibilities being distributed more evenly. New leaders have developed their own action plans to address the improvement areas identified within the inspection report. As a result, the academy now has accurate information on pupils' progress and behaviour, and literacy and numeracy improvements are being implemented. Further work is now required to analyse how well different groups are performing and to check that recent improvements are working so that further priorities can be identified.

Leaders are assessing the quality of teaching and the amount of progress pupils are making by regularly observing lessons and checking work in pupils' books. A training programme has been planned that links to staff development needs. Leaders are confident that teaching standards have improved significantly since the inspection as a result of new appointments, appropriate training and more rigorous monitoring systems. Systems for managing the performance of teachers and other staff are now in place. However, targets need to link more closely to pupils' progress measures.

Leaders and governors took swift action to address concerns about the safety of the academy site. Boundaries have been repaired and strengthened where necessary to ensure that no pupil can leave unnoticed. Other safeguarding systems, including how checks are made on new staff, meet statutory requirements.

An external review of governance was commissioned and initial recommendations made to strengthen the level of support and challenge offered by the governing body. Some of the recommendations have been acted upon. However, a full review and further actions will not be carried out until the future governance of the academy has been decided. Final decisions about this have yet to be made and will take some time to action. A considerable amount of time has been spent on

discussing new governance proposals and this has prevented members from focusing on other improvements. Governors are aware that further delays should be kept to a minimum and are working to improve their own effectiveness in holding school leaders to account in the meantime. However, they are not yet using assessment information and evidence to hold leaders and staff accountable for the academy's performance.

### **External support**

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the proprietors have now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. However, timescales for how quickly improvements will be made are unrealistic and unlikely to be achieved.

Governors and school leaders are now drawing on a wider range of external support which they consider to be effective in providing them with necessary assistance and advice. This has included arranging support from the local authority to provide staff training. A School Improvement Partner has helped school leaders to prioritise the actions that need to be taken and start to measure how effective improvements have been.

Leaders and governors continue to be supported by the strategic leader, provided by a local outstanding secondary academy, for two days a week.