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Mr J Bradshaw
Interim Principal
James Brindley School
Bell Barn Road
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Birmingham
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Dear Mr Bradshaw

Special measures monitoring inspection of James Brindley School

Following my visit with Simon Mosley, Her Majesty's Inspector and Derek Barnes, Ofsted Inspector to your academy on 24–25 November 2015, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015. 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015

- Ensure that the procedures for safeguarding are equally good across all centres by:
 - making sure that non-attendance is always followed up swiftly, that very prompt action is taken when a pupil's whereabouts are not known, and that all actions are clearly recorded
 - tailoring the safeguarding policy so that it deals specifically with the needs of the different groups of pupils who are taught by the academy
 - ensuring that all staff know the procedures to follow and who to go to at their own centre when they have a concern about a pupil's wellbeing
 - making sure that governors know how effective safeguarding procedures are at each centre
 - minimising the use of part-time timetables at all centres
 - reviewing the Pathways programme so that pupils have access to full-time education, or as close as their medical needs allow, in line with statutory guidance.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that all safeguarding procedures are effective, including those for following up non-attendance
 - accurately analysing pupils' attendance at each centre and the reasons for non-attendance
 - thoroughly analysing the work of each centre so that strengths can be maximised, and relevant actions planned and implemented
 - consistently following up monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure that the actions that have been identified for staff to take have been taken
 - ensuring that information about pupils' achievement is analysed precisely in order to know if pupils at different centres, with different needs and staying for different lengths of time, are making enough progress
 - ensuring that governors receive full, accurate and timely information about all aspects of the academy's work, particularly safeguarding, attendance and achievement, so that they can provide more effective challenge and support
 - seeking to expand the governing body so that they can distribute tasks and gather first-hand evidence of the effectiveness of each centre.
- Improve pupils' attendance by:
 - setting high expectations for each pupil's attendance
 - developing a more effective range of strategies to help those pupils with low attendance to attend more frequently

- emphasising the importance of attendance at lessons in each of the centres
- celebrating good and greatly improved attendance at school and at lessons.
- Improve the quality of teaching and thereby the outcomes for pupils, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - consistently using assessment information as well as a range of monitoring information to identify aspects of teachers' work that need improvement, and supporting and challenging teachers in a focused way so that these improvements happen
 - ensuring that all teachers expect consistently high standards of effort and presentation from pupils
 - making sure that marking is frequent enough and helps pupils to feel proud of what they have achieved, and to know what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring that all learning environments across all centres are of an equally high standard and support learning.

An external review of governance, including a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24–25 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal, senior and middle leaders, the pastoral support workers, groups of teaching and non-teaching staff and the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body. Throughout the inspection, inspectors analysed the academy's evidence about teaching, learning, attendance and safeguarding. Not all of the academy's sites were visited during this monitoring inspection. Inspectors visited Northfield, Parkway, Bridgeways, Dovedale and Newbridge centres, where they spent time in lessons, observed breaktimes and spoke to pupils. Visits of varying lengths were made to 32 lessons, across a range of subjects.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three senior leaders, 21 teachers (including some who were employed on a temporary basis) and eight support staff have left the academy. Thirty teachers and 25 support staff have joined. The provision previously known as Pathways has been reorganised and is now called Bridgeways.

Outcomes for pupils

The academy's assessment information is not yet analysed in a way that shows how well pupils are progressing across the academy and in each centre or how well different groups of pupils are doing in different subjects.

A larger percentage of pupils gained five or more GCSEs in 2015 than in 2014. The proportion gaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C was very low in comparison with national averages but, again, was higher than in 2014. The academy's information indicates that around a third of pupils made nationally expected rates of progress in English between the end of Key Stage 2 and the end of Key Stage 4, and less than a quarter did so in mathematics. However, many pupils were not part of the academy for the whole of this time. This is not, therefore, an accurate reflection of the progress they made while at James Brindley, but the academy does not have the necessary information to know what they did achieve during this time. Information that the academy does have suggests that there were some marked individual successes.

When inspectors looked at pupils' work during lessons and observed them learning, positive progress was often evident. Many pupils take great pride in their work and often show a good level of understanding of the subjects they are studying. Nevertheless, some pupils' progress is hampered by their low or sporadic attendance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Academy staff have been working on improving the feedback that they give to pupils and the way in which this feedback is then used by pupils to improve their work. They have also been developing the use of questioning to extend understanding and the level of challenge in the work that pupils are given to do. Improvements were seen in all of these aspects.

Inspectors saw some good use of feedback, both in pupils' books and folders and in the way teachers talked to pupils about their work. In one mathematics class, for example, the comments in pupils' books were carefully tailored to their different needs – sometimes detailed and challenging, at other times, shorter and very encouraging. Pupils had responded well and shown that they had understood the points being made by the teacher. Similarly, in an information and communication technology lesson it was evident that pupils had learned from the way in which the teacher had fed back his evaluation of their learning in previous lessons.

Questioning was a strength in many of the lessons visited. Teachers clearly know their pupils well and know when to challenge and probe and when to persuade and encourage. In the best examples, teaching assistants were persistent in helping the more reticent pupils to respond, even when they were reluctant to do so. As a result, pupils were able to see that they could achieve well and be successful.

Lessons visited had more consistent energy and drive than has been evident in the past, and this is resulting in pupils achieving more in the time available. Pupils are responding to the higher expectations that teachers have of them.

Occasionally, staff do not take advantage of the small numbers in classes to tailor the work to each pupil's need, which hampers their progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Throughout the inspection, pupils were pleasant and polite to inspectors, staff and each other, even when they were anxious. Many showed their keenness to learn, answering questions eagerly and rising to the challenge presented by staff. Quieter pupils responded well where teachers adapted their approach, talking quietly or individually to them. The sensory resources that are being used at Dovedale and Northfield are helping some pupils to manage their anxieties, for example by talking to a puppet rather than an adult at the start of a lesson. The academy has improved strategies to ensure that pupils do not miss learning time by leaving a lesson for too long. For example, some pupils leave lessons with the teacher's permission, but take with them a large timer so that they know when their five minutes has elapsed.

Attendance is very low at a number of the centres. However, the new expectations and strategies are having a positive impact on many individuals. At Dovedale, there

has been a considerable rise in overall attendance this term, which is now close to the national average. Punctuality to school and lessons has improved generally and leaders have good plans for pupils who need more support to arrive at school on time.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim principal is providing well-focused and wide-ranging leadership which is having a clear impact on driving improvement in the academy. With the support of the assistant principals, he has thoroughly analysed the strengths and weaknesses centre by centre and across the academy. This analysis has allowed leaders to focus their actions precisely. Across all the centres visited, there was a renewed sense of energy and purpose. Leaders, in particular, frequently spoke of feeling empowered to do their jobs, but this sense of purpose was also evident among staff at all levels. There is a growing consistency across centres in many aspects of the academy's work.

Work to improve the quality of safeguarding has been very effective. The safeguarding policy has been rewritten. The new policy is very thorough and clear. It deals systematically with expectations and procedures. It includes useful and detailed information on a range of safeguarding issues. Importantly, aspects of safeguarding that are particularly pertinent to the needs of different groups of pupils at the academy are explained clearly. The importance of following up attendance thoroughly is emphasised well. The interaction between the academy's own procedures and those of the different sites on which centres are based are made clear where needed. For example, the safeguarding policy tells staff which hospital managers they should also inform where a child protection issue arises, while emphasising the need for staff to take full responsibility for ensuring that the issue is followed up appropriately.

Inspectors spoke to a range of staff at each of the five sites visited during the inspection to see how well they understood the new safeguarding policy and how they were putting it into practice. Without exception, they were knowledgeable about the policy and the related procedures. They were able to explain confidently what they had learned at recent training, for example about the exploitation of women, radicalisation and extremism. Staff could describe how they would respond to child protection incidents and many gave good examples of where they had taken decisive action.

The new attendance policy and procedures are also well thought-out and robust. Low or sporadic attendance remains a serious issue for many pupils, but the academy has clear information about each absence and follows this up swiftly and rigorously. The academy will rightly involve the police if they fear that a child's whereabouts are unknown, but have seldom had to do so as parents and carers are largely responding to the prompt telephone calls or visits. The work of the pastoral

support workers is having a positive impact on building relationships with families. Leaders have made it clear that pupils are expected to attend school for the whole of each week unless there is a genuine medical reason not to do so. The use of part-time timetables has been greatly reduced and all pupils who attend the centres have access to full-time education, if their health allows it. At Newbridge, this has raised an issue about funding – while the academy is now offering all pupils a full-time education in line with their entitlement, they do not receive the full funding to do so. The interim principal is currently following up this issue.

Leaders are carefully monitoring the quality of teaching, using a suitable range of methods. These monitoring activities are being recorded on a comprehensive database which allows for useful analysis and follow-up. A new performance management policy has been introduced, which staff have been involved in designing. The criteria for teachers to proceed to the next pay level are clear, as is the support that will be provided to staff if needed.

Leaders of mathematics and English have now been given the time and authority to carry out their roles properly. They have organised frequent meetings of their subject teams, and staff are therefore receiving better and more tailored support. Expectations are clearer and leaders are able to carry out appropriate monitoring and evaluation activities.

The assessments of what pupils know and can do in each subject are becoming more accurate and teachers' understanding is becoming more secure. However, the way in which assessment information is currently analysed is not fit for purpose, as it does not take sufficient account of the length of time pupils have been at the academy. There is no useful tracking system to help leaders to ask questions and to intervene where needed.

The governing body has been expanded, and is now able to carry out its role more effectively. Governors demonstrate a clear drive and desire for rapid improvement. There is now a full committee structure in place, including one that monitors the progress being made against the Ofsted action plan. A committee has been set up for each of the different centres. These are very new, but the intention for governors to gain more information and to be more evaluative about each centre is clear and well thought-out. Governors are making visits to the academy to monitor progress in the areas of improvement for which they are responsible. Some of their notes of visit are detailed and incisive.

The governing body commissioned a review of the academy's use of the pupil premium, as recommended in the section 5 inspection. The review concludes that the academy does not have sufficient information about the impact of the pupil premium on the outcomes for pupils. It also raises an important issue about the lack of pupil premium funding received for pupils who are not on the roll of James Brindley full time.

External support

The interim principal, with the support of the governing body, has commissioned a range of useful and relevant support for the academy. This is ensuring that the academy is not insular in its development, and is supporting senior and middle leaders in the various areas of their work. Impact is evident, for example on the improvements that have taken place in mathematics.