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Mr Robert Gladwin and Mrs Katrina Kerry
Acting Principals
The Manor Academy
Park Hall Road
Mansfield Woodhouse
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG19 8QA

Dear Mr Gladwin and Mrs Kerry

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Manor Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 7–8 December 2016, 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 that have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2016.

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.

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

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers in science or modern foreign languages.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive of the Two Counties Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2016.

- Raise academic achievements and progress in all subject areas, especially mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils catch up rapidly and that the most able pupils attain the highest results
 - ensuring that all teachers use information about pupils' starting points to plan effective learning for all pupils, and especially for pupils who have special educational needs or disability
 - improve further the accuracy of assessment to enable precise identification of those pupils who are not making sufficient progress and provide them with learning appropriate for their needs.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by building on the strongest practice in the school, and ensuring that all teachers:
 - deepen pupils' understanding effectively by planning learning that engages and challenges different groups of pupils, including the most able pupils
 - support and challenge disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs or disability to make at least the progress expected of them
 - support all pupils to be more self-confident and articulate learners, especially older boys.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the school's performance and plan strategically for its sustained improvement
 - senior leaders prioritise developments in a timely and appropriate way to bring about rapid improvements in curriculum provision, teaching, learning and assessment
 - all subject and other middle leaders build their capacity to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within their subjects and across the school, resulting in improved outcomes for all pupils
 - the directors of the school challenge leaders more stringently, and hold them to account for the strategic improvement of the school.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 07 December 2016 to 08 December 2016

Evidence

The inspector met with the two acting principals, other senior leaders, members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors, the chief executive of the trust and a headteacher from another school in the trust. The inspector also met with a range of middle leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the heads of English and mathematics, the second in department in science, the acting head of humanities and the head of physical education and vocational learning. The inspector spoke to pupils in lessons and held meetings with groups of pupils from a range of year groups, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. He also met with a parent. The inspector observed learning in 15 lessons, accompanied by one of the acting principals. He looked at pupils' work in books. A range of documents were scrutinised, including the single central record of staff and the school's child protection policy as well as records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. The inspector looked at documentation with regard to bullying. He reviewed the school's current self-evaluation and improvement plan as well as the latest performance information. He also considered records of visits to the school from the representatives of the trust. While the inspector considered the achievement of Year 13 students in their 2016 A-level examinations, no other activities relating to the sixth form were carried out during this visit.

Context

The school joined the Two Counties Trust on 1 September 2016. This has resulted in a transfer of authority from the governing body to the trust's board of members, with some powers delegated to the local governing body. The trust, founded in April 2016, consists of three other secondary schools, all of which are judged to be good by Ofsted.

Since the inspection, 11 teachers have left the school. Eight new teachers are in post. Six members of staff are currently on maternity leave, including the substantive principal. Two acting principals are leading the school until the principal's return. At the time of the inspection, eight other members of staff were absent due to ill health.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

With excellent support from the trust, the school's acting principals are working skilfully and effectively to improve the school. As a consequence, the quality of teaching is improving and pupils' progress is accelerating. The school's improved examination results this year reflect the effective work carried out by leaders to improve the school, prior to and following the section 5 inspection. They also

reflect, however, the challenges which remain. For example, while pupils' achievement in English and mathematics was much better than in the previous two years, achievement in humanities and modern foreign languages remained weak. Disadvantaged pupils achieved better results than in previous years but continued to make considerably less progress than other pupils.

The effectiveness of middle leadership has increased since the section 5 inspection. Middle leaders are making a bigger contribution to the school's improvement than before, with the increased levels of responsibility they have been given matched by good systems of quality assurance and accountability. Strong leadership in English and mathematics has had a particularly good impact in improving outcomes for pupils. The increased time provided for the SENCo to carry out his role is enabling him to scrutinise the effectiveness of teaching and learning more thoroughly than before. Nevertheless, the impact of middle leadership in some subjects is being hindered by unavoidable staff absence, for example in science and modern foreign languages.

Senior and middle leaders know where teaching is strongest and where it needs to improve. Their evaluations of the quality of teaching are accurate because they draw on a wide range of evidence. For example, senior and middle leaders regularly scrutinise pupils' work to ensure that the teaching they observe is typically what the pupils experience. Their checks are planned carefully through the year and are closely aligned to the school's revised improvement plan. As a result, governors can check easily whether the improvements being made are keeping pace with their plans.

Leaders have not been afraid to tackle the weakest teaching through the school's robust performance management arrangements. Much of the weakest teaching has been eradicated. Thirteen teachers are currently receiving additional coaching to improve aspects of their practice. School leaders can point to clear examples of how this approach has improved teaching and is continuing to do so. They also ensure that teaching reflects the school's improvement priorities. For example, in all lessons, teachers are expected to identify the strategies they will use to support and challenge the most able pupils, boys who find it more difficult to engage with their work, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Good examples were seen of teachers using the 'hashtag (#) challenge' to push pupils further. The school's strategies to push the most able pupils in Year 11 through the 'Manor All Stars' programme are being successfully extended to other year groups.

Staff have a much stronger knowledge of the specific needs of the pupils they teach who have special educational needs and/or disabilities because of the improved quality of documentation they receive and through training provided by the knowledgeable and committed SENCo.

However, the improvements being made to teaching are currently being

compromised by the need to use temporary staff to cover a significant minority of lessons. In part, this has been caused by the vacancies created by staff leaving the school in the face of robust and effective performance management. Older pupils who met with the inspector spoke positively about the school but also expressed frustration with the amount of teaching they receive from cover teachers. Observations of teaching and the scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection highlighted the marked difference in pupils' progress in science, for example where pupils have not received consistently good teaching from permanent staff. Leaders do not take into account sufficiently the impact of this additional staffing in their judgements about the quality of teaching overall. While the support and guidance that temporary staff receive from senior and middle leaders is better than usually seen, more needs to be done to ensure that pupils' learning is equally strong, regardless of who is teaching them.

Governors are playing an increasingly effective role in holding leaders to account. They value the additional expertise brought to the governing body by the appointment of two governors from within the trust. Greater clarity has been brought to individual roles and responsibilities and governors now have improved oversight of the improvements being made. The original improvement plan and statement of action submitted to Ofsted did not meet requirements. These have been amended appropriately and are now fit for purpose.

The school's website meets most but not all requirements. Currently, it does not set out clearly enough what pupils will study in each subject in each year. The curriculum is currently under review, including in Year 7 and in key stage 4.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The much-improved results in English and mathematics in 2016 are testimony to the improvements made to the quality of teaching in these subjects. Teaching in mathematics has improved particularly strongly from a previously low base. This is due to some good appointments, including at senior level, effective leadership by the head of mathematics and the recruitment of better teachers.

The quality of work in pupils' books reflects the good teaching they are receiving in English. In almost all classes, pupils' work is presented well, reflecting their pride in their work, their teachers' high expectations and the good progress they are making. Pupils' books show that teachers' marking and assessment is having a clear impact in raising pupils' attainment. The work in pupils' books also indicates that pupils are making good progress over time in mathematics. Strong teaching was also observed in humanities, for example in a geography lesson in which the pupils researched information about the impact of climate change. In this lesson, pupils worked extremely effectively together. They had clearly been motivated to do their best by their teacher and their books showed that their strong work ethic and good-quality learning are typical of this lesson.

In contrast, the quality of teaching in science and modern foreign languages remains too variable. Observations of learning across a range of Year 8 science lessons, for example, highlighted a marked difference in the quality of teaching in science. Whereas in one lesson pupils were working extremely effectively, interpreting graphs to draw conclusions about the depletion of the earth's resources, in the other lessons pupils were not challenged so well. There are clear differences in the quality of pupils' work – and the quality of the presentation of their work – depending on which class they are in. This is particularly the case where pupils have not had a permanent member of staff teaching their lessons regularly. Leaders know that teaching in modern foreign languages is not consistently strong enough but, with support from the trust, they are ensuring that pupils currently preparing for examinations are being taught well.

Teachers are increasingly skilled in meeting the needs of different groups of pupils in their classes and leaders ensure that they make provision for pupils' different needs. The introduction of the 'hashtag (#) challenge' is ensuring that teachers give greater priority to ensuring that the work is challenging enough, including for the most able pupils. The most able pupils I met in Year 7 all spoke very positively about the quality of teaching they receive, and were able to articulate how the work was harder than in Year 6. The pupils I met who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were positive about the support they receive, though some judged that they are not challenged sufficiently in mathematics.

Teachers' questioning is a strength and reflects the good-quality training that the school has provided. Teachers routinely pose questions around the class to ensure that feedback is not dominated by the pupils who are most confident. In the lessons seen, this ensured that all pupils paid attention. Teachers are also skilled in giving pupils time to reflect before answering questions. This results in more thoughtful and sophisticated responses. The school's approach to marking and assessment is strong and, when applied effectively, has a very positive impact on pupils' learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

In the lessons visited, pupils generally behaved well and, where teaching was strong, their behaviour was impeccable. In these lessons, the pupils take pride in their work, are respectful of each other and their teachers and are eager to learn. Nevertheless, pupils say that behaviour is not always good, particularly in the lower sets. In discussions, the younger pupils said they would like to see teachers have the same high expectations in the lower sets as they do in other classes. One said, 'The more higher the set you are, the stricter the teachers.' Others agreed. Some pupils in Years 8 and 10 expressed frustration that their learning is hindered by the same small minority of pupils who persistently misbehave. They perceive that these pupils are not been dealt with effectively enough or quickly enough.

The school's records show that the proportion of fixed-term exclusions has reduced

very significantly, in part through pupils' better behaviour but also through the use of internal provision, 'altex', used as an alternative to exclusion.

Senior leaders have increased the school's capacity to monitor attendance and particularly the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. While attendance overall continues to be in line with the national average, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities generally attend less well than their peers. While the school is dealing with some complex cases, especially in Year 10, it is rightly continuing to focus attention on diminishing gaps in attendance between different groups of pupils.

All the pupils who spoke to the inspector said that they feel safe, including the Year 7 pupils, who were all very enthusiastic about all aspects of their school. The pupils all said that bullying is rare and that it is dealt with effectively by staff. The school's records confirm this to be true. While record-keeping is generally strong and detailed, the records do not show whether the school has followed up incidents of bullying after they have been dealt with to ensure that they have not recurred.

Outcomes for pupils

Examination results from the 2016 summer GCSEs show significant improvements on the previous two years. While pupils' progress in their best eight subjects overall was significantly below average compared to other pupils nationally, it was markedly better than in the previous two years. The biggest improvements were seen in English and mathematics. In English, for example, pupils made progress in line with similar pupils nationally. This is a big improvement compared to previous years and reflects good work undertaken to accelerate pupils' achievement in English last year. Similarly, in mathematics, concerted efforts by staff and better teaching overall had a strong impact in improving attainment, with the proportion of pupils attaining a GCSE at grade A* to C increasing from 47% to 76%. As a result, the proportion of pupils securing grades C or above in both English and mathematics increased from 42% to 62% to be in line with other schools nationally.

Some improvements were seen in the science results, from a very low base, with many of the most able pupils securing qualifications in three separate sciences this year. The attainment of pupils taking core and additional science remained too low. Improvements were also seen in humanities, though pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11 also remained too low in humanities overall. Pupils' achievement in modern foreign languages remained poor.

While disadvantaged pupils continued to achieve significantly less well than other pupils, clear improvements were evident from the summer's results. Overall, the improvements seen in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils compared to previous years proved to be more rapid than for others. A strong programme of support and additional teaching helped secure rapid gains in disadvantaged pupils' achievements in mathematics in the run-up to their examinations. The improved

pass rates for disadvantaged pupils in mathematics reflect well on the school's strategy of deploying significant strands of pupil premium funding towards mathematics. Boys' achievement improved but was still significantly lower than the achievement of the girls. Leaders rightly continue to focus their attention on improving outcomes for boys, disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Achievement at A level was mixed this year. The strong performance seen, for example, in English literature, mathematics and business studies was mirrored by weaknesses in achievement in psychology, sociology and religious studies.

External support

The school's membership of the Two Counties Trust is having a clear and positive impact in improving the school. It has enabled senior and middle leaders to draw on a wide range of expertise. The two acting principals, for example, are receiving excellent support from the experienced headteacher who is chief executive of the trust, as they lead the school while the substantive principal is away. Following the section 5 inspection, leaders from the trust quickly identified key aspects of the school that needed to change in order for it to improve quickly and sustainably. This early work meant that some of the changes brought about by trust leaders were already in place when the school joined the trust officially on 1 September. For example, the chief executive of the trust quickly identified that the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders were not sufficiently clear. As a result, a revised, streamlined senior leadership team was put in place for the start of September, with absolute clarity in leaders' roles secured.

The oversight provided by leaders from the trust has increased governors' confidence about the quality of information they are receiving from the school leaders. Governance is much stronger than before. Clear lines of responsibility have been established between the powerful board of trustees and the local governing body. Local governance has been strengthened, for example by the appointment to the local governing body of a headteacher from another school in the trust.

This is a trust that takes its responsibilities seriously. In a short space of time, the strategic oversight provided by leaders from the trust has been matched with valuable practical support. The trust is providing high-quality teachers – and leadership expertise – in modern foreign languages, for example to help strengthen the quality of teaching in languages, particularly for GCSE pupils. Leaders from across the school are benefiting from the opportunities provided to collaborate with staff from other schools in the trust.

Leaders recognise that a key part of the school's journey will be for the trust gradually to remove support as the school becomes more able to stand on its own two feet – especially if and when the trust grows in size.

Priorities for further improvement

- Monitor more rigorously the quality of teaching by temporary staff so that additional support can quickly be implemented to ensure that all pupils receive consistently effective teaching.