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Mr Philip O'Hear
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Hear

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holbrook Academy

Following my visit with Angela Skinner, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 20–21 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 29 February 2012. 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 posted 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 Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012

- By September 2013, increase the pace of students' learning and progress to raise attainment to at least the national average by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good or better teaching
 - ensuring that assessment is accurate and lessons well planned so that all teaching challenges all students
 - consistently developing students' skills in literacy and numeracy in other subjects as well as mathematics and English.

- With the involvement of parents, carers and students, by September 2012, tackle issues that a significant number of them are concerned about by:
 - ensuring that all teachers implement behaviour policies consistently so that disruptive behaviour in class is eliminated
 - devising and implementing a structured homework policy for all subjects that includes how it is marked and clear guidance to ensure that homework consolidates classroom learning.

- By September 2012 improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - improving systems for observing lessons so that students' learning and progress are accurately monitored
 - systematically identifying and disseminating the very best practice in teaching and learning, for example that found in English and history
 - holding school leaders fully to account for the progress made by students
 - ensuring that all targets for performance management are challenging, clearly understood by those who are responsible and accountable for them, and set within a precise timeframe
 - ensuring that the governing body monitors all improvements rigorously, challenging where appropriate.

Special measures: monitoring of Holbrook Academy

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 20–21 March 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other relevant staff, groups of students and the Chair and four other members of the Governing Body. The lead inspector attended part of a meeting of the governing body.

Context

Since January 2013, a new interim headteacher has been in post. The head of school is supported by an additional associate deputy headteacher who is working within the leadership team for this term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards are continuing to rise. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above, including mathematics and English, was above the national average in 2012. The proportion of students obtaining the top grades in GCSE examinations is also rising, but more slowly. Students generally make good progress in lessons as a result of better teaching. The academy has identified that progress in Key Stage 3 needs to be better. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs still make slower progress than other groups in the school and when compared with similar groups nationally, but the numbers are small. This makes comparisons with previous years difficult. The small numbers of students who are supported by additional funding from the government through the pupil premium are not making as much progress as they should.

Students are given more frequent opportunities in lessons to work independently and are developing well the skills they need. An increasing proportion of students are taking a very active part in the work to improve the academy. They have written their own action plan and have formed a group to try to raise the aspirations of all students, organising visits by speakers from a range of professions to come and speak to them.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- increase the pace of students' learning and progress to raise attainment to at least the national average – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

A higher proportion of good teaching is improving progress and achievement. Teachers provide interesting activities in lessons, making use of a good range of resources, including technology. Teachers have good subject knowledge and the majority use it well to make their explanations clear and to enthuse their students. A much greater proportion of teachers provide opportunities in their lessons for students to work independently or in pairs or groups. They are also making sure that students of all abilities are given opportunities to discuss the topics they are studying, and this is improving their speaking.

In order to make sure students have work that is suitably matched to their needs, teachers are making use of a greater range of techniques. An example is their use of seating plans to place students where they can support or challenge each other. Many teachers are producing extra resources so that all students can benefit fully from the class tasks. An area still to develop is the additional challenge provided for more-able students.

Additional adults in classrooms give increasingly good support to students who need a little more help. The academy has recently revised the plans which show how individual students can best be supported. These are welcomed by teachers and students but are new and so have yet to have a positive impact on the progress these students make.

Teachers provide better feedback to students when they mark their work. In the most effective practice, teachers and students enter into a written dialogue. Teachers are finding different ways to develop this, such as in an English lesson, where the teacher had written individual questions for the students after marking their work and asked some of them to respond as a starter for the lesson. Good progress is being made to ensure that homework makes a positive contribution to students' learning; it is set more regularly and students use their organisers well to keep a record of what they have to do. In both these aspects, practice is more consistent than at the last visit.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- tackle the issues that parents, carers and students raised regarding the devising and implementing of a structured homework policy for all subjects that includes how it is marked and clear guidance that homework consolidates classroom learning – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students behave well in the large majority of lessons and have positive attitudes to learning. Very little off-task behaviour was observed during the visit, although a

small group of students still need support to manage their behaviour. This does not generally disrupt learning. Around the academy, students behave responsibly. Students report that this is usually the case and inspectors were treated with great respect and politeness. A group of senior citizens who join the academy for lunch told the inspectors that they find the students well behaved and considerate. Some students act as excellent ambassadors for the academy at public events.

Students' behaviour in many lessons contributes to good learning. They are developing the skills they need to research topics, to discuss issues and to organise their time. This allows teachers to devise interesting activities such as the example seen in a religious education lesson: students moved up and down a line of chairs arguing for and against a range of scenarios in a mature and productive fashion.

Attendance is average and students arrive punctually at the start of the day and to lessons. Students eligible for the pupil premium attend less regularly than other groups.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- tackle the issues that parents, carers and students raised regarding the consistent implementation of behaviour policies so that disruptive behaviour in class is eliminated – good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Changes to the leadership of the academy are still being finalised. The new interim headteacher has quickly gained the trust and respect of students and staff. He is ensuring that the governing body is well informed of the progress being made to address the remaining weaknesses.

Senior leaders are being supported well by the associate deputy headteacher to develop and refine the way targets are set and how the progress students make is monitored. Information is gathered on students' progress, behaviour and attendance. Systems are in place which allow the different strands of this information to be considered together in order to provide the best support. The way the academy monitors the progress of students in Key Stage 3 still requires improvement as it is not yet leading to increased progress in this part of the academy. Further changes to the structure of leadership systems are planned and capacity is growing to continue to improve the progress students' make without additional support.

Teachers and parents feel that communication has improved. Parents are kept fully informed of their children's progress. Teachers increasingly share good practice and ideas for effective classroom activities. Students have much more opportunity to give their views on what works for them in the classroom. An area still to develop is in

improving the formal opportunities for middle leaders to share information and ideas between each other.

Teaching is monitored regularly and weak practice challenged. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and inadequate teaching has almost been eradicated. More teaching is good or better and some outstanding practice was observed during the inspection. The results of monitoring activities are used to develop plans for the next steps, but these currently lack clarity on how success will be measured. This is particularly the case for the governing body, whose members would benefit from greater detail of how they will check that actions taken to improve the quality of teaching are having the desired effect. The governing body is increasingly checking that information they are given on students' progress has sufficient detail and is accurate. They are making sure that the academy website has all the information it requires and that financial matters are conducted properly. They understand the need to raise the profile of the academy in the local community.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve leadership and management, including governance – satisfactory.

External support

The additional support that has been commissioned to improve the quality of teaching is having a positive impact. An external review of the provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs has been commissioned. Links have been formed with external organisations to support individual subjects. Specialist leaders of education have supported subject leaders and links with other schools have been extended to include opportunities for moderation, planning and sharing good practice.