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Philip O'Hear
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Hear

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holbrook Academy

Following my visit with Piers Ranger, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25–26 June 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 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 – good.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 25–26 June 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, senior leaders and other relevant staff, groups of students and the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body.

Context

The senior leadership team is no longer receiving additional support. A permanent headteacher will join the academy in September 2013. A new finance director is in post.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards continue to rise, especially for the most able students, because teachers have higher expectations for what students should achieve. However, the academy is still not meeting the challenging targets it sets, except for the proportion of students gaining A or A* grades in GCSE examinations.

An above-average proportion has made three levels of progress in English and mathematics by the time they leave the academy. Students have more opportunities in lessons to discuss their work and teachers demand longer and more detailed answers to their questions. As a result, students are developing very good speaking skills. Some put these to very good use in meetings held to discuss the awarding of a catering contract for the academy.

In lessons observed during the visit, no students made inadequate progress and, for many, their progress was good. Few were making outstanding progress, especially in the younger year groups. The data the academy collects indicates that progress accelerates as students move into Years 10 and 11. Leaders are fully aware of the need to improve early progress in order to reduce the need for later intervention.

Progress is not even across the different groups in the school. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and those eligible for additional government funding through the pupil premium, make slower progress than others, but the gaps are slowly reducing. The gap between the progress of boys and girls is still too wide.

Students currently in Year 10 are further ahead than was last year's cohort at this time in the academic year. This is because of better teaching and more effective use of data to identify early any who are falling behind.

Achievement is weaker in some subjects, including French, art and history. A small number of students needing help to improve their reading have benefitted from effective support and their reading ages have increased, in some cases by over three years.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

The quality of teaching

Students are positive about the improvements in teaching, and parents are pleased with the improvements to the way homework is set and marked. It now complements learning in lessons well. One parent spoke of the whole-family discussions that homework has generated in some subjects.

Many teachers plan lessons well so that students can meet the objective of the lesson. Not enough teachers make full use of information from assessment to adjust the activities for individual students. More-able students in Key Stage 4 are benefitting from additional challenges teachers set for them. This is less evident in Key Stage 3. The academy is revising the individual education plans for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. New plans are in place for students with a statement of educational needs or those on school action plus. Others still have the older style that is far less informative. Not enough teachers yet make use of the information contained in individual education plans to ensure progress accelerates for these groups.

Other assessment activities have improved. Many teachers check on progress regularly and adjust their teaching if necessary. Some make good use of self- and peer-assessment to increase independence, but this is a weaker feature of some lessons. Students have clear targets and know how well they are doing in most subjects. Assessment is moderated carefully and is accurate. Teachers make good use of questioning in English to check on and deepen understanding. When teachers mark students' work, the comments they give are generally helpful to students to show them how to improve.

Teachers praise and encourage students so that the majority work hard. Many teachers produce interesting resources and use information and communication technology well to add enjoyment to their lessons. An outstanding example of a teacher making a lesson fun and highly successful was in a religious education lesson where students were debating whether religion was a good or bad thing. The teacher made it absolutely clear how students needed to behave in order to be successful. He used time limits and targeted questioning exceptionally well to keep

the pace of learning for all students brisk. Students made outstanding progress and did not realise how hard they were working.

The quality of teaching is still variable, especially when teacher absence is being covered. A new teaching and learning policy has been produced which makes expectations much clearer and should support teachers new to the school better than the existing policy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students behave well around the academy. The vast majority have positive attitudes in lessons and disruption in lessons is rare. It only occurs where teachers do not make their expectations fully clear. Students feel safe and parents confirm that they are satisfied with the care their children receive so they are happy to come to school, although this is not reflected in pupils' attendance.

A major improvement since the last visit is the provision of opportunities for students to contribute to improving the academy's work. Student ambassadors from all year groups and prefects are acting as influential leaders and positive role models for others. They have taken on a wide range of responsibilities in subjects such as sport, drama, art, modern languages, design technology and careers education. They see their role as bringing their chosen subjects 'to the forefront of other students' attention'. Increasingly, they are helping to develop the quality of teaching and learning and attend meetings of the governing body.

Attendance gives cause for concern. It is below the national average. Pupils eligible for the pupil premium, in particular, miss too much schooling through regular bouts of extended absence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The completed restructuring of the leadership of the academy provides clear lines of accountability, good communication and greater clarity of vision. The strategic leaders of learning are developing their skills well through training and by working together to share good practice. As a result, teaching has improved and staff regularly enter into a dialogue about teaching. Rigorous and decisive action is taken where teaching is not good enough, so that inadequate teaching has been eradicated and more is good or better.

Improvement plans are detailed and clearly set out the timescale for improvements and how progress will be measured. The role of governors in monitoring is less clear. Subject leaders are being supported well by the head of school to improve the quality of their planning, which also lacks detail.

Governors are developing stronger links with faculties or other areas of the academy's work, such as behaviour and attendance. They support and challenge the academy's leaders well and bring a range of useful skills to their roles.

Communication with parents and links with the community are much better than at the time of the last inspection. Parents are very pleased with the information they receive on their child's progress and the speed with which the academy responds should they have questions or concerns.

Leaders make better use of data on students' progress to inform their improvement work, but some of the ways of displaying the data make it hard to spot patterns; too many different methods are in use. Subject leaders are less clear on how to use data to improve work in their areas of responsibility.

A new pay policy is in place to strengthen the use of performance management to reward successful teachers and create leadership opportunities for all staff.

In order to raise the aspirations of students further, better use should be made of display around the academy to celebrate success and give examples of what outstanding achievement looks like.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve leadership and management, including governance – good

External support

Links with other schools are providing good opportunities to share expertise. The academy has benefitted from external audits of provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Leaders of the academy are receiving excellent support for financial planning from Suffolk local authority.

Priorities for further improvement

In order to ensure that the good progress continues, leaders of the academy should:

- raise attendance to at least the national average by December 2013
- reduce persistent absence for students eligible for pupil premium funding so that it is no worse than for other groups.