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Ms Nancy Robinson
Principal
Ipswich Academy
Braziers Wood Road
Ipswich
IP3 0SP

Dear Ms Robinson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Ipswich Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 June 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in July 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

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

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Academy Council, the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk, the Education Funding Agency, the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit and the Chief Executive Officer of the Learning Schools Trust.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2013

- Improve teaching so that most is at least good by:
 - ensuring that lesson challenge students of all abilities
 - planning lessons to allow flexibility and opportunities to develop skills of independent learning within all classes
 - ensuring consistent high quality making of written work.

- By improving teaching, ensure that all groups of students make progress that is at least in line with national expectations, so that their attainment reaches at least the national average, particularly in English and mathematics.

- Improve provision for the most able students by ensuring that they are challenged more in class.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that, through watching teaching, leaders identify and tackle those lessons that are not pitched at a high enough level
 - devising ways to ensure that students receive intensive literacy and study skills support when they start at the school, so that they become confident learners.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16 June 2014

Evidence

I met with you and other senior leaders, subject leaders for English and mathematics, groups of students from Key Stages 3 and 4 and the Chief Executive Officer of the Learning Schools Trust. I looked at documentation provided by the academy on students' achievement, records of the quality of teaching, records of behavioural incidents and minutes of meetings. I also scrutinised the academy's records of recruitment checks of staff. I visited seven lessons and was accompanied by senior leaders to two of these. You agreed to distribute the Ofsted staff questionnaire and I considered 80 responses from members of staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection, 13 teachers have left the academy. All of these have been replaced with permanent staff, many of whom will be joining in September. Currently this term, there are some long-term supply teachers in post. Plans have been agreed to restructure the school day by replacing the six 50-minute lessons with three lessons lasting 100 minutes from September 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

You, your senior leaders and the governors have not taken effective action to ensure that all of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection are being addressed quickly enough. While it is clear that systems have been put in place which aim to drive improvement and some are clearly starting to have an impact, progress in some areas is slow or you are unable to measure the impact of some of your initiatives because they are too recent. You face a number of challenges, including the recruitment of teachers of high calibre, and have demonstrated your commitment to improving the quality of teaching by not appointing weaker candidates. However, this means that some classes are being taught by agency teachers, and the quality of this teaching is variable. In addition, students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning, which improved when you moved into your new school building, have started to decline and are acting as a barrier to learning and progress.

Members of the senior leadership team are clear about their role in driving improvement and are able to demonstrate the degree of impact their work is having on improving the academy. You are monitoring the delivery of your action plan and most, but not all, actions have been completed by the deadlines. However, the quality of leadership at subject leader level remains inconsistent. You are starting to form a more accurate picture of the quality of teaching in the academy by taking into account not only teaching observed, but also students' outcomes and the quality of work in their books. Too much teaching currently requires improvement and has not accelerated students' progress quickly enough across all subjects.

Overall, systems for gathering information about students' progress have improved. This means that leaders and governors have a more accurate view of students' achievement. Teachers also have information on students' prior attainment and expected progress but some are using this information more smartly than others when planning lessons.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- You have taken action to eliminate most of the inadequate teaching and have started to work productively with teachers whose teaching is not yet good by requiring them to participate in various training programmes.
- You have refined your systems for assessing students' progress and teachers have been provided with relevant information to plan lessons which meet all students' needs better. Teachers are expected to plan lessons which present an appropriate level of challenge to everyone in the class.
- Your focused work with 45 students in Year 11 who you identified as higher attaining has met with some success in helping them to make better progress in English and mathematics.
- You are closing the gap in achievement between those students who receive pupil premium and others in the academy, although their achievement does not compare favourably with national figures.
- You have raised the profile of literacy among students and teachers by providing teachers with appropriate training. You have written a new marking policy and have started to correct poor literacy when marking students' books. You have worked with some teachers to strengthen their own literacy skills so that they become good role models for students.
- You have rightly identified that some students who enter the academy in Year 7 with weak literacy skills require more intensive support, and have removed them from their normal English lessons to tackle this.
- You have made some gains in improving students' outcomes in English and have boosted some students' progress through additional learning sessions outside of the classroom.
- You have reviewed and modified your mentoring programme for students so that students have 15 minutes with their tutors every two weeks to discuss progress, and participate in an extra-curricular activity every other week. This helps students think more about how they learn and where they have gaps in their knowledge.

- You have attempted to engage more parents and carers in their child's learning and progress, with some success. For example, your parent forum meetings aim to keep them informed about the academy's progress and to listen to their concerns.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Strategies for improving outcomes in mathematics have had very little impact. Although you have attempted to address the lack of permanent staff in mathematics by deploying your stronger teachers more strategically to teach middle-attaining students, this has made no significant difference to raising levels of attainment. Your current information on attainment and progress for students in Year 11 indicates outcomes are likely to match those of 2013.
- Your forecast outcomes for students in Year 11 who study sciences are a cause for concern and you expect students to underachieve in these subjects. When I visited science lessons for Key Stage 3 briefly, little learning was taking place and students' attitudes towards their teachers were poor.
- Because the quality of teaching is variable across subject areas, there is too much inconsistency in students' rates of progress.
- Too much teaching requires improvement because teachers are not always planning for learning which provides an appropriate level of challenge, despite being provided with more accurate information on students' capabilities.
- Some work provided to students is too easy and some is beyond their grasp. Some teaching requires higher-attaining students to start with the easiest tasks, when they could opt for a task which is more demanding.
- Marking is not consistently effective in helping students to realise what they have done well and how they can improve their work. There is very little evidence of students responding to their teachers' marking so that they can demonstrate progress.
- Students' poor behaviour in lessons and their negative attitudes to learning are acting as a barrier to accelerating progress. Too often lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Not all teachers tackle this consistently by following the academy's published guidelines. Students told me that poor behaviour in lessons is a daily occurrence, and they often hear bad language used by students in lessons and when moving around the academy.
- Senior leaders have not yet gained the confidence of the whole staff. Responses to the staff questionnaires express some dissatisfaction with the quality of

leadership. Over half of those who responded do not believe that behaviour is good in the academy and around one third do not believe that behaviour is consistently well managed or that all staff consistently apply academy policies.

External support

The Learning Schools Trust monitors the impact of the action plan regularly. It has provided consultancy support for the English and mathematics faculties but support for mathematics in particular has not had the desired impact in raising standards. The Trust has added additional capacity to the Academy Council by recruiting new members with necessary skills.

Following the judgment at the first monitoring inspection, the Learning Schools Trust has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose by linking it more closely to the academy action plan and identifying how it plans to inform parents on progress being made.

Priorities for further improvement

- Explore effective strategies for tackling poor behaviour and attitudes in lessons so that teachers can provide lesson activities that engage all students, and students can learn effectively.