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15 September 2014

Emma Laflin
Acting Headteacher
Alde Valley School
Seaward Avenue
Leiston
Suffolk
IP16 4BG

Dear Miss Laflin

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Alde Valley School

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in September 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

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

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students, especially boys, are capable of achieving
 - maintaining the pace of learning by balancing teachers-talk with time for students to learn by themselves and in small groups
 - providing students with sufficiently challenging work that captures and retains their interest for the full duration of lessons
 - planning and teaching different tasks matched to the needs and abilities of all students, especially those who are disabled or who have special educational needs
 - making full use of classroom assistants to support students of lower ability who need help with their work, and evaluating the impact they have on students' learning
 - making regular checks in lessons on how well students are progressing.
- Raise achievement in mathematics so that most students make the progress expected of them and do as well as in English by:
 - prioritising rapid and sustained improvements in mathematics in the school's improvement plan
 - enhancing the monitoring of teaching and learning in mathematics lessons and acting decisively when the quality is found to be less than good
 - ensuring that there is a permanent leader of mathematics in place to secure long-term sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching and the achievement of students.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that new procedures for monitoring and evaluating lessons by middle leadership become embedded and lead to a higher proportion of teaching that is consistently good
 - clarifying the roles and responsibilities of teachers and staff responsible for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, so that these students remain in school and receive the additional support they need to help them achieve as well as others
 - making sure that additional funding to support the school's most vulnerable students is used wisely so that they achieve as well as other students
 - strengthening procedures to promote regular attendance
 - increasing the level of challenge provided by the governing body in holding senior leaders to account for the school's performance.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 September 2014

Evidence

I met with you and senior leaders, groups of students from Key Stages 3, 4 and the sixth form, the Chair and four other members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. I looked at the progress the school has made in addressing the key areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. I looked at a wide range of school documentation, including information on achievement, attendance, your self-evaluation summary of the school's progress and minutes of meetings. I also scrutinised the school's records of recruitment checks on staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has retired, and you have been acting headteacher since 1 September 2014. An acting deputy headteacher has been brought in from another school. One assistant headteacher has also left the school, and another has relinquished their senior leadership responsibilities to become the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). Ten teachers have left the school, and recruitment of suitably qualified mathematics teachers remains a challenge for the school. Your plans to become a sponsored academy on 1 October 2014 have been delayed.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders, managers and members of the governing body have not successfully tackled the legacy of underachievement in the school with enough urgency, particularly in mathematics. Whereas the proportion of students gaining good grades in English was sustained in 2014, it fell further in mathematics. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and mathematics also fell. Leadership at subject leader level remains inconsistent, and forecast outcomes in the majority of subjects were not achieved in 2014.

Senior leaders have started to work more productively with the local authority since the previous monitoring visit in attempting to tackle some of the key barriers to school improvement. Since commencing your role as acting headteacher, you have started to raise standards of behaviour in the school. Students, staff and governors are positive about your impact and that of your senior team, although this is at an early stage and there are still many challenges ahead. The newly formed senior leadership team is regarded as a more cohesive team and there are clearer lines of accountability. You have produced an updated school action plan and collect information on students' academic performance on a more regular basis.

An external review of governance has now been completed and an action plan has been produced. Governors acknowledge that a great deal of work remains to be

done in order to secure their effectiveness. Governors acknowledge that they did not always request the information they needed in the past or ask pertinent questions. This prevented them from providing an appropriate degree of challenge. They acknowledge their need to develop their understanding of achievement data, and to become more strategic in their approach towards school improvement.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- You have made suitable use of external training organisations to target teachers in underperforming subject areas, although reports from the local authority refer to a mixed rate of engagement by teachers.
- The SENCO has reviewed the effectiveness of the learning support assistants, and these members of staff are now linked to subject areas. They also participate in appropriate staff training.
- You are starting to inform your judgement of the quality of teaching in the school by taking account of students' outcomes and the quality of teachers' marking. This is supplemented by visits to lessons. These observations of teaching sometimes focus on the achievement of boys or students who are disabled or who have special educational needs. You have carried out some work with subject leaders on judging the quality of teaching through joint observation strategies.
- My scrutiny of available evidence and visits to lessons show that teachers are demonstrating a greater awareness of the needs of different groups of students in their classes. Higher-attaining students' needs are being better planned for.
- Your allowing students in Year 9 to cease studying three subjects so that they can select GCSE options early has released more time for them to study English and mathematics. However, it is too early to measure the impact of this policy.
- You have held progress meetings with subject leaders to provide a more appropriate level of challenge and support.
- You have appointed an Aspirations Ambassador to work with students who have low self-esteem. It is too early to measure the impact of her work.
- You are rightly focusing on improving staff well-being and on raising their morale. You are aware that the high staff absence rate last year had a negative impact on raising students' outcomes.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Standards in mathematics have not improved and progress across the school has not accelerated at a quick enough rate to secure rapid improvement.
- You are deploying five non-specialist teachers to teach mathematics. This is not helping to raise standards in this key subject. Some teachers of mathematics are not applying the new marking policy with enough rigour.
- Some students told me that they experience teaching which requires them to copy work from the board regularly without the work being explained in

enough detail. This does not guarantee that they understand what they are being taught or that they are making any progress.

- There remains a wide gap in attainment between students who have special educational needs and other students in the school. The gap between those students eligible for the pupil premium and others in the school is also too wide. These gaps are not closing quickly enough. Support targeted at these students have not been thought through clearly enough. Hence the governing body is not ensuring that this additional funding is being suitably deployed.
- Boys have continued to underachieve in English, although their progress in mathematics within the school compares favourably to that of girls.
- Although the quality of marking has improved steadily and more teachers are providing guidance on how to improve, this is not always worded skilfully enough to secure a meaningful response from students. Some students simply respond with 'OK' or 'Thank you' which does not show that they are making better progress because of the marking.
- Students' attendance over the last academic year has remained variable and, although it improved slightly compared to the previous year, it remains well below the national average for secondary schools.
- Although you have updated your school action plan and produced this in a more concise format, the current plan is not detailed enough. It does not make clear who is monitoring the delivery of actions taken. Some of the ways in which you intend to measure the success of your actions are too vague and lacking in precision. Although the plan identifies key times during the year when progress against actions is to be measured, it is not clear for those who will be monitoring your progress what you expect to have achieved by the deadlines.

External support

Since my previous visit, the relationship between the school and the local authority has improved and support has increased notably since Easter 2014, when the local authority conducted a two-day review of the school's progress. This review highlighted a number of barriers which have prevented the school from moving forward quickly enough. The mathematics adviser carried out some helpful work with non-specialist teachers of mathematics and has brokered the provision of external support to improve the quality of teaching, initially targeting teachers of mathematics and science as well as individual teachers across a range of subjects. However, the quality of teaching, and hence its impact on students' progress, remains inconsistent. The local authority plans to support the school in refining the most recent school action plan to make it fit for purpose.