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Pamela Hutchison
Executive Principal
Ipswich Academy
Braziers Wood Road
Ipswich
IP3 0SP

Dear Mrs Hutchison

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Ipswich Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 27 November 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 third 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.

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, the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education- Academies Advisers Unit.

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 academy, so that they become confident learners.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 27 November 2014

Evidence

I met with the executive principal, the associate principal, other senior leaders, groups of students from Years 7 to 11 and the sixth form, the Chief Executive Officer of the Trust (the Board of which is the Governing Body) and the Chair of the Academy Council. I examined academy improvement documentation and information on students' achievement, as well as the academy's records of recruitment checks on staff. I visited a number of classes, either accompanied by the associate principal, or alone, to observe students at work and to look at their books.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the principal has resigned and a new executive principal took up post in September 2014. The senior leadership team has undergone a restructure. Two members of the senior leadership team are to leave the academy in December 2014. Students' lessons have been extended to 100 minutes per session.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Leaders, managers and members of the governing body have not secured rapid enough improvement since the previous section 5 inspection. The majority of the areas for improvement identified in the previous section 5 inspection have not been tackled with enough rigour to demonstrate impact and to improve the academy at a fast enough rate. The Trust has not tackled weak leadership early enough, and little time remains until the academy's reinspection. Recruitment of high calibre staff remains a challenge for the academy, and not all teachers appointed have matched the high expectations you have set in your drive to raise standards. Some classes continue to be taught by agency teachers and the quality of this teaching is variable. Indeed, the quality of teaching overall has not improved quickly enough to have an impact on students' outcomes. Low-level disruptive behaviour continues to act as a barrier to students' progress, although systems for dealing with poor behaviour have become more embedded. However, poor behaviour remains an everyday occurrence in lessons.

You have wisely restructured the senior leadership team and have introduced the role of director of inclusion to tackle matters relating to students' behaviour and attendance. You have rewritten the academy's improvement plan so that it aims to tackle all of the previously identified weaknesses, and you have already evaluated the progress you have made against the action points in the plan.

Since your arrival at the academy in September 2014, you have identified a number of weaknesses which you are attempting to rectify through decisive action. Leaders' view of the quality of teaching in the academy was overinflated, as were teachers'

forecasts for students' outcomes. Too much teaching in the academy is either inadequate or requires improvement, which has had a negative impact on students' outcomes. Most teachers are responding positively to your requirement that they improve their practice through additional support. Subject leadership is not yet consistently strong in order to drive rapid improvement across all subjects in the academy.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- You have reassessed the quality of teaching in the academy so that the current profile is more realistic and reflects the poor impact on students' outcomes.
- You acknowledge that teachers' forecasts of students' outcomes were largely inaccurate in 2014. Consequently, you have abandoned forecasts and have concentrated on establishing more accurate assessments of students' current levels of attainment. You have done this by using practice examination papers and getting these assessments checked externally.
- You have increased the number of times during the school year when you plan to gather information on students' achievement. This will enable you to intervene more swiftly.
- You have reduced the number of daily staff briefing sessions to one, and use these more strategically to discuss aspects of teaching. You also run whole-school sessions every fortnight, focused on aspects of teaching. Your weekly staff bulletins also provide regular reminders about your expectations for teaching in the academy.
- You have ensured that the marking of students' work is conducted regularly and you expect teachers to identify how students can improve the quality of their work. This has started to happen. You recently held a staff training session with examples of what good marking looks like and how it should accelerate students' progress.
- You are taking students' views more into account when planning for school improvement, and are developing the leadership skills of sixth form students by providing them with more opportunities to contribute to the work of the academy.
- A recently conducted internal survey of staff views shows a growing confidence in the academy's leadership arrangements, particularly with regard to improving the quality of teaching.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Students' attainment fell significantly in 2014, with only 19% of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including in English and mathematics. This outcome was well below what had been forecast, and well below the national average.
- The proportion of students who made expected progress in both English and mathematics in 2014 fell, and was well below the national average set in 2013. Students also underachieved significantly in science.

- There is too much variation in students' attainment across subject areas which reflects the inconsistent quality of teaching across the academy and the previous weak management of teaching. The majority of teaching across the academy is not effective in accelerating students' progress at a fast enough rate.
- Your academy improvement plan, although covering all of the academy's weaknesses, does not identify realistic targets for when you plan to measure for progress. Current progress suggests you are unlikely to achieve your identified targets for the quality of teaching and the impact of leadership by the deadlines.
- Your plans to improve students' behaviour and engagement do not provide enough detail on how you plan to tackle low-level disruptive behaviour.
- There is too much low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons. I observed too many students disengaged in their learning. Incidences included doodling in books, rocking backwards and forwards on chairs, and playing around with classroom equipment. Students confirmed this, and their perception is that the majority of their lessons are subject to such disruption.
- Teachers' planning is not sharp enough to ensure that all students know what they are expected to have achieved by the end of the lesson or how they will achieve the learning outcomes. Some students observed had finished their work and were not provided with additional work to challenge and extend their learning.
- Although teachers are marking students' work more regularly, not all students are responding to their teachers' comments to demonstrate that they have understood what they got wrong. Some teachers are more skilled at writing points for improvement than others.
- The staff survey continues to express concerns about students' behaviour and how consistently staff apply academy policies.

External support

The Trust has appointed an executive headteacher who brings with her experience of leading an effective school. Previous support offered by the Trust has not had a strong enough impact to bring about a rapid rate of improvement. The Trust is currently supporting leaders in forming more accurate judgements on the quality of teaching and assessments of students' levels of attainment. Support has also been provided to strengthen the leadership and teaching of mathematics and science.