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Mrs Alison Tilbrook
Principal
IES Breckland
Crown Street
Brandon
IP27 0NJ

Dear Mrs Tilbrook

Special measures monitoring inspection of IES Breckland

Following my visit to your school on 10–11 March 2015, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. 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.

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

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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

Christopher Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - making sure that students are taught by a permanent group of high quality teachers
 - acting with determination to eradicate inadequate teaching
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and plan their lessons so that all students, and especially the most able, are fully stretched
 - sharing the best teaching practice that exists in the school more widely
 - focusing on the progress that students make when evaluating teaching rather than on the teaching activities
 - improving the consistency and rigour of homework and teachers' marking
 - improving assessment and the use of data to check on the impact of teaching.

- Raise students' achievement in all subjects and key stages by:
 - ensuring students practise skills in numeracy and literacy in lessons other than English and mathematics
 - tackling the gaps in attainment between boys and girls in English and mathematics
 - tackling students' poor behaviour by making sure that teachers manage behaviour consistently across the school
 - ensuring that students understand what they need to do to improve their work
 - making sure the curriculum meets the needs of all students.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - simplifying the way that school leaders check on performance so that school improvement plans are based on more accurate information
 - making sure that teaching, learning, marking and homework are monitored properly by subject leaders
 - providing additional training for governors, especially in using data to evaluate school performance
 - ensuring that performance management holds teachers to account for the success of their students.

- Urgently tackle weaknesses in safeguarding and recruitment procedures.

- Urgently fill vacant management and teaching posts.

An external review of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 10–11 March 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met the Principal, Assistant Principal, subject leaders, seven governors and members of SABRES (the educational trust) and a representative of IES (the educational provider appointed by SABRES). He visited lessons, and met with students to discuss their work and how the school has improved recently.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, four teachers have left the school due to promotion or relocation. They have been replaced by four permanent teachers.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is improving in important areas of the school. The school's most recent assessment data indicate that over 40% of student in Year 11 are on course to achieve five A* to C GCSE passes including English and mathematics in the summer. This figure is below the national average but represents a significant improvement, as only 10% of the same students were on track to achieve this at the same stage in 2014.

The school predicts that 60% of students will gain a good pass in both English and mathematics. This reflects a significant improvement in English, which has been much weaker than mathematics in the recent past.

Achievement in some subjects is especially rapid. Good leadership and teaching are having a clear impact on achievement in, for example, geography. This can be seen in the outcomes of a recent controlled assessment which will contribute to the final examination grade: all students achieved their target grade and over half of them exceeded it by at least one grade. Most impressively, over a third produced work at A and A* standard.

Attainment gaps between disadvantaged students and others are variable. The interventions for Year 11 students in English have been very effective, and school data show that these gaps have closed. This is not the case in mathematics, where gaps remain. The picture is very similar for students with special educational needs, who are making better progress in English than in mathematics because the quality of support in this subject is much better.

The quality of teaching

The number of classes where students' work is of a high standard is rising because more teachers have raised their expectations. Students acknowledge that more is required of them now and many are responding well. In a small number of classes, students are making very rapid progress as a result of outstanding teaching over time.

The school's work to improve handwriting and presentation is having an impact. Many teachers are now identifying errors in spelling, punctuation and, on some occasions, grammar. The impact of this work is clear in some classes, where teachers' high expectations are leading to work that is very well-presented. In the diminishing number of classes where teachers are not enforcing the school's policy well enough, the quality of presentation remains poor.

The feedback that students receive is improving but there are still some teachers who provide irregular feedback which does little to promote learning. In one set of mathematics books, for example, hardly any of the feedback was about the lesson, but commented simply on presentation. In stark contrast, a growing number of teachers are providing students with a very high-quality oral or written feedback about their work. These teachers are also ensuring that presentation maintains a high standard through regular monitoring during lessons. Examples of such high-quality feedback were observed in English, geography, history, science and business studies.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour continues to improve across the school. Students report noticeable changes in recent months and, as teachers have raised their expectations, students are adopting much more positive attitudes to their learning. Disruption to learning in lessons is now infrequent, and very little time is wasted dealing with poor behaviour. Students welcome this and credit the school's leaders with making substantial and positive differences.

Attendance is broadly in line with the national average for secondary schools.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The roles of subject and faculty leaders have expanded since the previous monitoring inspection. Some of these leaders have become much more involved in the strategic leadership of improving teaching. Where these leaders have been successful – for example, in English and the humanities – achievement has risen significantly as the quality of teaching has improved. The leadership of all subjects and faculties is not as effective, however, and more needs to be done to ensure that all subjects are well led.

Assessment has improved because senior leaders are now providing subject leaders and all teachers with better information about how well students are achieving, both as individuals and groups. A much more precise system of gathering and distributing this information has been implemented very recently. Some leaders – in science, for example – have been very quick to see the potential of the system and have scrutinised it and already have a much clearer understanding of how students are doing in each class.

Senior leaders have a strong understanding of the school's priorities. Their improvement plans enable them to check on progress and monitor the impact of the improvement work that they are doing. Senior and subject leaders are knowledgeable about individual teachers' strengths and where they need to improve. A culture of coaching has been embedded effectively, allowing leaders to make use of the available talent in the staff, alongside external support from a teaching coach, to fine tune the support that they are providing for individual teachers.

Governors are working more cohesively with the SABRES Trust, IES (the sponsor) and senior leaders to promote improvement. Governors are now asking school leaders the right questions (such as 'How do you know?' and 'Can you show us the evidence?') more frequently, and they are becoming increasingly familiar with the workings of the school. They are frequent visitors to the school, and they look at students' work to check on, for example, their improving presentation. The governors recently commissioned an external review of the way that pupil premium funding is spent and its impact. This was being conducted during the monitoring visit and the outcomes have not yet been published to the school.

External support

The school is working effectively alongside representatives of IES to achieve their common goals. IES are providing a teaching coach to work for two days each week to improve teaching. In combination with the regular visits and support of an IES representative, this is a contributory factor in the schools' improvement. This coaching approach has resulted in significant improvements for individual teachers in a relatively short period of time.