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Sarah Wilson
Principal
Sawtry Village Academy
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Huntingdon
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Dear Mrs Wilson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sawtry Village Academy

Following my visit with Jamie Clarke and Susan Hargadon, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 3–4 June 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection in June 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 academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs.

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 Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently ensure all safeguarding and health and safety requirements are fully met.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring self-evaluation is firmly based on the impact of actions taken by all leaders on the quality of provision, outcomes and leadership
 - ensuring the governing body is effective in meeting its statutory duties
 - ensuring all members of the governing body are given training to support them in questioning and challenging the judgements of senior leaders and in using a wide range of evidence in order to be convinced of the academy's effectiveness
 - ensuring senior leaders have robust procedures in place to track and evaluate the support provided for students who need additional support improving staff morale and ensuring that they all feel fully supported in all aspects of their work.
- Raise overall achievement by:
 - embedding the systems for setting targets for students and tracking their progress towards those targets
 - ensuring the remaining gaps between the achievement of different groups in the academy close.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - extending to all subjects the good practice that has successfully raised achievement in English, mathematics and science
 - improving teachers' skills in questioning students so that all make good progress in lessons
 - developing teachers' skills in communicating what students will learn so they better understand the aims and purpose of each activity ensuring teachers provide sufficient challenge for students in their work
 - ensuring the good practice that has developed in marking in some subject areas becomes standard practice across the academy.
- Improve the behaviour and safety of students by:
 - improving the systems for recording and monitoring the progress and welfare of vulnerable students
 - providing all staff with the help they need to apply the behaviour policy consistently, including reporting incidents
 - sharpening the work on preventing bullying so that students not only understand the issues, but also how to deal with the effects and all students are confident that by reporting bullying incidents these will be tackled
 - improving attendance, including the systems for alerting parents when children are absent.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 3–4 June 2015.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, nominated senior and middle leaders, three groups of students and two governors, including the Executive Principal of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust.

Context

The academy became part of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT) on 1 April, at which point it changed its name to Sawtry Village Academy and rebranded its logos. The academy governing body became the local governing body of CMAT, accountable to the Trustees of the new academy trust. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed, along with two new governors and a new clerk. Previous governors have agreed to the new governing body.

In the wake of the academy's transition to CMAT, substantive leadership appointments have been made. The Principal and Vice Principal have been made permanent appointments, as have two Assistant Principals who also previously held interim positions. One Assistant Principal is leaving at the end of term, as are two subject leaders.

Since the last visit, the academy has reconfigured its leadership roles and has agreed a restructuring of the academy's pastoral support system, which will be implemented fully in September. Each of the four newly named 'houses' will have a Head of House and a student support officer. These arrangements are intended to ensure oversight of students' academic progress and personal welfare, including their attendance. Interim appointments have also been made for the leadership of the sixth form leadership and student support.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Current assessment and student tracking data indicates that the headline results at GCSE this year are likely to match those achieved in 2014. Encouragingly, the proportions of students making or exceeding expected progress from their respective starting points look better than last year. Students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding, including disadvantaged students, are also on course to make better progress than did similar students last year. In the sixth form, the academy is confident that students' achievement will be better than in 2014. Higher achievement is the consequence of improvements in teaching, alongside more systematic target setting; together these have made students more aware of their potential. Teachers, generally, have higher expectations and are more alert to

students who are falling behind, so that interventions to support underperforming students have been more swiftly implemented.

Despite the likelihood of improved achievement this year, students' progress and attainment are not yet good enough. The wide variability in the quality of learning, which was observed and reported in previous visits, persists. Students make slow or uneven progress when teachers are not ambitious enough, or on those occasions when teachers do not manage unacceptable behaviour.

The quality of teaching

Teaching continues to strengthen, but improvement has not been rapid enough over the last 12 months. The quality of teaching was judged to require improvement in the inspection in February 2013, and again in June 2014, but evidence from this visit indicates that it is still far too inconsistent. This is because the quality of learning observed in lessons and seen over time suggests that students could achieve more. Too often, students are not stretched, either by the level of challenge presented or by the amount of work they are expected to do in lessons or at home.

Recent initiatives to promote group work and sharpen teachers' use of starter activities have been reasonably successful in improving the engagement of students at the beginning of each lesson. Two observations, one in mathematics and one in English, illustrated how these approaches are promoting high-quality learning. Work was challenging, but well supported by good resources and well-prepared group tasks that necessitated collaboration to shape and refine answers. Teachers and other adults were able to circulate and differentiate their inputs to stretch and support students according to their individual learning needs. Despite this, however, too many starter activities are not pitched at the right level to make students think hard, recap important learning or ascertain what they know; some starters are dull. Students say that working in groups has made work more interesting, but that this approach is sometimes too prescriptive. Moreover, despite rearranging tables in some classrooms to encourage more collaborative working, teachers do not give students enough to do, often preferring to stand at the front and pose a series of questions that do little to build students' knowledge or understanding. A key priority from the last inspection was to improve teachers' questioning and yet, in too many lessons observed, the starter questions and teacher-led discussions restricted or slowed students' learning.

Subject leaders are not leading the improvement of teaching as they should. It is not evident that subject leaders understand what constitutes good teaching, and how this is inextricably linked to good learning and achievement over time. Subject leaders do not employ effective strategies for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. They are too reliant on senior leaders or external support, most recently from the Academy Trust, to lead improvements.

The academy has made some progress with improving marking, which was a key priority from the last inspection. Lots of teachers are working hard with their marking, recognising that this is helping to accelerate students' progress and to encourage positive attitudes to learning. Good practice is evident in English and humanities. The recent initiative to identify specifically 'what went well', and how work could improve ('even better if'), has helped to focus attention on accelerating progress, and there are signs that students respond positively to this guidance. However, this approach to marking also highlights some weaknesses in the quality of the work set. Some teachers have made little effort to keep up to date with their marking.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The improvements noted previously, in both behaviour and safety, have been consolidated. At break and lunchtimes, the academy is calm and orderly. Students interact sensibly and show respect for one another, as well as for adults and visitors. Students say that they feel safe, and they recognise that the good levels of supervision have improved behaviour.

Most students have positive attitudes to learning, work steadily and behave well in lessons. However, senior and middle leaders have not eradicated poor behaviour from the classroom. It is still too often the case that lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour, even in Key Stage 4. Off-task chatter is not uncommon, but rude and confrontational behaviour sometimes has a more serious impact on the learning of others and sours the learning environment. It is evident, from talking to students, that it is difficult to establish a climate of high aspiration and celebration of achievement when students scoff at the efforts of others. The academy's expectation that students will be orderly, while waiting for a lesson to start, has brought some consistency, but this expectation is not implemented by all staff.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have quickly implemented the necessary changes to leadership and management responsibilities, including the rationalisation of additional payments to teachers for their teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs) and the restructuring of support roles, with considerable skill and efficiency. Effective accountability has now been established, linked to clearly defined job descriptions and performance indicators. In addition, essential systems for ensuring financial probity and effective oversight of vital maintenance and safety matters are now firmly in place. Necessary changes to the information and communication technology infrastructure have also been swiftly made.

It is to the credit of the senior leadership team that the changes have been made seamlessly, and that the academy is almost fully staffed for September, with just a couple of teaching vacancies to fill. Much of the Principal's time has been taken up

with residual investigations and the introduction of systems and procedures that would ordinarily have been in place in other schools. One consequence of this is that the efforts on improving the quality of teaching have not been as focused and robust as they have needed to be. Procedures for evaluating and improving teaching, including the establishment of a group of 'lead teachers', are developing, but have not yet had a wide enough impact on the quality of classroom practice to achieve greater consistency. In the 12 months since the last inspection, there has been only limited progress in developing regular or rigorous self-evaluation by subject leaders and others holding positions of responsibility.

The smooth transition to CMAT governance has also been managed very well. Governors are sufficiently well informed and are thus able to hold senior leaders to account and provide suitable support and challenge. However, the minutes of governing body meetings indicate that governors do not always interrogate senior leaders closely enough; for example, in regard to the participation and achievement of disadvantaged students.

External support

The academy has benefited from considerable high-quality support and guidance from CMAT, including advice and external evaluations by specialist subject leaders. This additional guidance has been welcomed by staff, including subject leaders, as has the opportunity to visit other schools and academies, both in CMA Trust and beyond. These developments are beginning to address the academy's previous insularity and bring in new ideas. It has also opened the eyes of staff to what they already do well.