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Alison Tilbrook
Principal
IES Breckland
Crown Street
Brandon
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Dear Ms Tilbrook

Special measures monitoring inspection of IES Breckland

Following my visit with James Fuller, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2–3 July 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 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.

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 Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of appropriate authority for IES Breckland
cc. Sue Cook Director of Children's Services for Suffolk

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 2–3 July 2015.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met the Principal, vice-principal, assistant principals, teachers, five governors and members of SABRES (the educational trust). They visited lessons, observed students' behaviour around the school and met with students to discuss their work and how the academy has improved recently.

Context

Three teachers have left the academy and have been replaced since the previous monitoring inspection. During the monitoring inspection, almost all Year 10 students were out of school on work-experience placements.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' achievements are improving in all year groups. The academy's predictions for the current Year 11 indicate that, from low starting points, the proportion of students gaining five A* to C including English and mathematics at GCSE is likely to be below the national average. The students have, however, made progress in the last three terms, as the proportion of students on track to achieve this was exceptionally low at the same point last year. The outcomes of GCSE examinations are not yet known. The academy's internal assessments indicate that the proportion of students making or exceeding expected progress between Key Stage 2 and Year 11 may be in line with national figures.

The school's assessment data for students in Year 10 show that they are on track to progress at the nationally expected rate by the end of Key Stage 4. This cohort of students joined the academy with exceptionally low starting points. Their levels of attainment remain low but are improving.

Progress in Key Stage 3, including Year 9, is strengthening. Improving assessment strategies and more robust moderation lend a greater degree of authenticity to the academy's own data, which have been very inaccurate in the past. These data show that pupils in the current Year 7 are making or exceeding expected progress in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of students achieving or exceeding expected progress reduces as the students' age increases. This is testimony to the improvements made in the last year, and how students without a legacy of past underachievement are now achieving well.

Across the school, the progress of disadvantaged students is too variable. In Year 8, for example, the gaps are too wide in mathematics but have all but closed in English. The gaps are at their widest in Year 10, where disadvantaged students are a long way behind the other students.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. Lessons now have a more focused start because of a revised policy which all teachers are implementing. The areas outside classrooms have been cleared, providing more space for students to line up before the lessons start. Teachers are insisting on a quiet, orderly entry to the classrooms, and this is creating a more positive climate for learning. This has been popular with both students and teachers: one Year 8 student, reflecting the views of many, said 'Our lessons now start more calmly, and we get straight to the learning.'

The school's revised marking policy – much needed due to considerable inconsistency across the school – has made an impact. Students reported that they prefer the new approach, which requires them to comment on their teachers' marking and evaluate their own progress. Some teachers have taken the change on board better than others, providing students with very helpful guidance and tips on how to improve. Where this is not so effective, comments are bland and mean little to the students. In one case, the teacher's writing was impossible to read.

Teachers are benefiting from the coaching provided by colleagues within the school and also from the sponsor, IES. Many teachers speak of how this has helped them to reflect on how they teach and to improve aspects, such as how they plan lessons and how they use questioning to extend students' understanding.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' report that there are few disruptions to their learning, and that this is an improvement on the past. Lessons are calm and students are respectful of their teachers. Key improvements in students' attitudes to learning have occurred since the previous monitoring inspection. Students are increasingly resilient: in the past they have been too quick to give up if things are difficult. In several lessons, students showed determination and commitment to completing their work. In a mathematics lesson, for example, a teacher set a challenging task which tested students' ability and willingness to solve a range of problems in order. Students stayed the course, trying different approaches until they found the right one, and they visibly grew in confidence as they worked. Students are also more interested in their own work. This was apparent in a science lesson, where students were very keen to complete their work so that they could get on to more challenging tasks.

Students' attendance has improved and is in line with national figures for secondary schools.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The recent improvements to the quality of teaching, students' behaviour and their achievement are largely due to the leadership of the Principal and her increasingly effective senior leadership team. Working very closely with heads of departments and faculties, leaders are establishing a culture of ongoing improvement for all. This means that all teachers, regardless of their experience or seniority, are looking for ways to improve their work. Experienced coaches, provided by the sponsor and with proven track records, are working alongside teachers – sometimes teaching with them and sometimes teaching instead of them to demonstrate their advice. Teachers are very positive about this, and value the impact it has made on their work.

The pace of change across the school is quickening, as senior leaders have become much more confident in the quality of teaching. The curriculum is developing well, and is supported by a range of extra-curricular activities and events. Many Year 10 students and their parents were, for example, positive about the work-experience placements.

Leaders are gathering evidence about the quality of teaching more effectively. Assessment data, previously unchecked and inaccurate, is now rigorously moderated. Leaders have asked the right question: 'How do we know the data are accurate?' and, as a result, the school now has much more information about students' progress. At present, however, leaders are not using this data to understand with precision where things are working and where more support is needed. This means that leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching rely too much on observations and too little on the impact of teaching on learning. Similarly, the school improvement plan does not refer to achievement enough when it sets out success criteria.

Governors continue to provide effective support and challenge for leaders. They are frequent visitors to the school and are involved in evaluating the school's work – often sitting in on meetings or discussions and reporting back to the full governing body. Governors are not, however, focusing enough on the impact of the spending of the pupil premium grant.

The school's safeguarding procedures are effective.

External support

Representatives of IES continue to visit the school from Sweden to offer very valuable support to leaders and to promote improvements in teaching. A teaching coach, provided by IES, is also working with the school on a regular, part-time basis. The positive relationship between the school and IES is a contributory element to the recent improvement.