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28 January 2016

Ms Amanda Phillips
Executive Principal
Ipswich Academy
Braziers Wood Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP3 0SP

Dear Ms Phillips

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ipswich Academy

Following my visit with Diane Fletcher, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 20–21 January 2016, 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 became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015. 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The Trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may 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 Chairman of the Board of the Paradigm Trust and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015.

- Improve the quality of teaching, including the sixth form, so that it is at least consistently good, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have strong subject knowledge and the skills to assess students' progress accurately
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve and use assessment information to plan lessons effectively to meet the needs of the different groups of students
 - mark students' work regularly and offer high quality feedback which helps students understand how they can improve their work
 - extend students' understanding of their work by using effective questioning and verbal feedback and by setting appropriate homework
 - develop appropriate strategies in the classroom to increase the confidence and skills of students so they have a thirst for knowledge.

- Improve the rates of students' progress in all key stages, including the sixth form, and so raise standards by:
 - speeding up the pace of learning to enable students to make the best possible progress
 - ensuring that all students receive appropriately challenging work, especially the most able
 - making better use of pupil premium funding to close the gaps in students' attainment and progress
 - improving students' levels of literacy in Key Stage 3
 - thoroughly planning all subjects in Key Stage 3 to ensure students can make consistent and even progress
 - reviewing admissions criteria and the advice and guidance given to students in Key Stages 3 and 4 to help them make more appropriate choices for sixth form study.

- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning by:
 - ensuring that low level disruption is rare and that students take pride in their presentation of their work
 - establishing thorough and robust systems to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.

- Rapidly improve the quality and impact of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring the academy's improvement plans are thorough, realistic and monitored effectively
 - making certain that senior and subject managers have the correct skills and experience to secure rapid improvement in the quality of teaching, behaviour and, in doing so, achievement

- increasing the capacity of governance, at all levels, to ensure it accurately challenges the leaders of the school and is able to hold them to account by independently assessing standards
- developing an effective whole-school approach to raising standards in literacy
- promoting opportunities in the curriculum for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to positively influence students' attitudes to learning
- ensuring appropriate professional development is provided, to teachers and leaders at the academy, through a more thorough and rigorous performance management system.

An external review of governance and the use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 20–21 January 2016.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Executive Principal, senior and middle leaders, two external consultants, two groups of pupils and two members of the Trust Board, one of whom is the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and another member of the IEB.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, four teachers have left the academy and five new ones have joined it. Four graduates have been employed as interns to support the academy's work in English, mathematics and science. Entry into the sixth form is currently suspended; all learners in Years 13 and 14 at the start of 2015 are now taught at a range of local providers, or are engaged in apprenticeships or employment.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils are making better progress than in the past, mainly because the overall quality of teaching they receive is improving. The academy's relentless drive to tackle weaknesses in teaching, iron out inconsistencies and make it more effective, more often is paying dividends.

Testing of pupils last term has given staff a clearer overview of their prior learning. This information has been used to re-organise pupils into classes of similar abilities, and enable staff to plan learning that challenges them and stimulates their interest. Staff are also using this information to set pupils challenging targets, and to identify those who need additional support to ensure they achieve them.

The academy's current assessment information about how well pupils are doing shows an improving picture, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Data collated from regular testing and assessment tasks in all subjects indicate that the majority of pupils are making better progress than they did last year and that, if this is maintained, they should meet the minimum required targets set for them. Senior leaders expect overall progress rates to be much better this year, and also above those achieved nationally. Current data forecasts that over 40% of Year 11 pupils will attain an A* to C grade in English and mathematics, which is higher than last year's results.

The quantity and quality of pupils' work is increasing, reflecting teachers' raised expectations of them. This still varies but, overall, books in most subjects visited by inspectors show signs of improvement. At times, learning is not planned well enough to ensure that the most-able pupils are fully challenged.

Teachers are better organised; most have assessment information and planning in place, and know the specific needs of each pupil in their classes. Agreed approaches to improve pupils' learning and progress are increasingly evident in lessons, such as managing pupils' behaviour, encouraging them to talk together before answering, and giving them feedback about their work. Pupils feel that teachers have higher expectations of them.

Senior leaders have responded promptly to tackling the shortfalls in basic skills some pupils have on arrival in Year 7. These pupils have extra lessons each week to help them read phonetically and, when they are ready, receive further support to improve their reading, writing and speaking and listening skills. For a small minority of pupils, this extends into Year 8 to ensure that they are suitably equipped for learning across all subjects. The progress of all pupils in Key Stage 3 is being routinely monitored against the targets they are expected to meet in GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4.

All staff are focused on ensuring that Year 11 pupils meet the higher expectations of them, by providing them with better teaching and support than they have had in the past. They now have a dedicated area for learning and socialising during the day, and for personal study before and after school. Pupils value the extensive programme of revision provided for them after school. A recent 'boot camp' held over a weekend enabled the majority of them to revise topics in depth, fill gaps in their learning and also enjoy themselves in outdoor and adventurous activities.

Additional funding is being used to ensure that disadvantaged pupils also achieve well enough, and that gaps in their attainment and progress, compared with other pupils, narrow. For example, additional staff in English and mathematics enable these pupils to be taught in smaller groups and receive one-to-one tuition to help them catch up. New resources have been purchased to improve the teaching of literacy skills to younger pupils, and to provide older pupils with revision guides.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Lesson observations, mostly carried out jointly with senior leaders, confirmed the academy's view that teaching is becoming more consistent. Some weak teaching remains, but senior leaders know where this is and know what to do to eradicate it.

Staffing changes are strengthening the quality of teaching, by bringing new ideas and promoting greater interest of pupils in some subjects. Unqualified staff on the Teach First programme feel they are receiving good-quality mentoring and support from staff to help them establish themselves and develop their teaching. Staff training, coupled with sharing of good practice and regular learning walks, are enabling other staff to develop their knowledge and understanding and increase their effectiveness.

Detailed subject knowledge, good relations and effective behaviour management are clearly evident in lessons where teaching is most effective. In these lessons, pupils are interested, engaged and eager to learn. Expectations of them are high; they are expected to complete all work promptly, and neatly. Teachers set clear timescales and make regular checks to ensure that all pupils understand fully before moving on.

In a minority of lessons, teaching makes less of an impact on pupils' progress. Learning is not planned to fully challenge pupils, swift action is not taken to tackle low-level disruption, and not enough attention is paid to the presentation of pupils' work. Spelling and grammatical errors are not highlighted and corrected. Some tasks are left incomplete.

The progress of less-able pupils is hindered because not all teachers check that pupils fully understand what they are doing before moving to the next stage of learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson pupils were expected to complete a series of questions but struggled to make progress because they did not understand the basic laws of calculating fractions and percentages.

Not all pupils fully understand the targets set for them; these procedures are new and are based on clear methodology, but the reasons for setting high, aspirational targets have not been explained fully to all pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The raised expectations of pupils' behaviour, punctuality and attendance noted at the time of the last monitoring inspection have been maintained. The academy is a calm and orderly place to be. Tutorials at the start of each day are being used more effectively to strengthen pupils' basic skills and prepare them for learning.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe. Following recent work to prevent bullying, several pupils act as ambassadors to listen to the concerns of others and help them resolve any issues arising. Older pupils feel that the regular presence of staff around the academy and outside at breaktimes is promoting better behaviour.

In the majority of lessons, behaviour is managed consistently. Agreed procedures such as 'hands-up' to attract pupils' attention usually work well, but not all teachers choose to use this technique. Pupils in both key stages said that their lessons are often interrupted by the behaviour of a small minority of pupils. Older pupils say this happens because some teachers 'give them too many chances', rather than following the academy's agreed procedures.

Procedures to manage challenging behaviour have been revised to provide pupils with an area to calm down and, if needed, another area to work in silence. These areas are calm and productive and appear to work. Fewer pupils are being referred to them. Rates of exclusion are falling but the proportion of disadvantaged pupils

being excluded from the academy has risen. A high proportion of pupils displaying challenging behaviour have been moved from the academy into pupil referral unit (PRU) provision.

Attendance is close to the national average. The attendance of a small proportion of disadvantaged pupils is much higher than others and presents a significant barrier to raising their achievement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders continue to work effectively as a team to secure and embed improvements. Clear leadership from the Executive Principal and training and development for senior and middle leaders is building further capacity to drive improvement. Systematic monitoring is holding all staff accountable. There is a growing, corporate willingness to secure long-term improvements to the quality of teaching, and ensure that outcomes this year are significantly higher.

A detailed statement of action is now in place and improvement plans are routinely scrutinised to gauge whether they are leading to improvements quickly enough.

Middle leaders value the training and tailored support provided for them to increase their effectiveness. They say they are becoming empowered to engage fully in the academy's drive to improve teaching and raise pupils' overall achievement. Regular meetings between middle leaders in different subjects are enabling them to learn from the best practice in the academy.

The concerns raised about provision in the sixth form have been fully resolved to the satisfaction of learners and their parents. Relocating learners to other local providers to enable them to continue their courses has been managed sensitively and effectively.

The Trust Board continue to use their knowledge and experience of school improvement to provide the academy with effective governance. An Interim Executive Board is overseeing the academy's development and providing senior leaders with regular support and challenge to drive improvement. This board includes members of the Trust, the Executive Principal, a parent, a headteacher of a local school and a representative of the local authority.

Stronger relations with parents and carers are being fostered through regular meetings of a parents' forum, newsletters on the academy's website and increased attendance at parents' evenings.

External support

Partnerships have been forged with a local secondary school, and another academy based in London. Experienced and effective leaders from these schools are providing regular training and support in a range of subjects, as well as one-to-one support for middle leaders, and are assisting the Executive Principal in raising the achievement of Key Stage 4 pupils. The academy continues to commission periodic external evaluations of teaching and pupils' progress to gauge how effectively its detailed plans for improvement are working.