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29 January 2016

Ms Sofia Darr
Principal
Waverley Studio College
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Bordesley Green
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Dear Ms Darr

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waverley Studio College

Following my visit to your school on 19–20 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2015.

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 statement of action is fit for purpose.
- I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or outstanding by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about students' progress, prior knowledge and understanding, to match work to their needs
 - embedding high expectations of what students can achieve and how students should behave in all lessons
 - promoting the reading, writing and mathematical skills of students in subjects outside English and mathematics
 - ensuring that students improve their work and skills based on high-quality guidance offered by their teachers
 - embedding recent systems to monitor and check the quality of teaching so that teachers are provided with regular feedback on how to improve their practice
 - securing the appointment of high-quality permanent teachers.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that robust systems are in place to monitor and track the progress of students from an accurate baseline of their starting points on entry to the college, including for those students with disabilities or special educational needs
 - making sure that plans for improvement address key priorities that are identified through rigorous self-evaluation and that these plans are linked to measurable targets so that the intended impact of actions can be evaluated
 - developing the skills of all leaders so that they have the capacity to bring about essential improvements to the quality of teaching and achievement of students
 - ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of all students, including those students with weaker basic skills on entry and the most-able students
 - evaluating the impact of the spending of pupil premium funding more thoroughly so that leaders and governors know which strategies are working best
 - carefully checking the accuracy of teachers' assessment of students' work in all subjects
 - making more systematic checks on teachers' planning and students' work to ensure that examination requirements are fully met
 - providing governors with robust and accurate information about the progress of students.

- Increase attendance so that it is in line with or better than that of other schools nationally by strengthening the range of strategies used to engage with parents and other agencies.

- Improve achievement at both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 by:
 - rigorously tracking the progress of all students and groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, across subject areas so that underachievement can be quickly identified and tackled
 - implementing well-planned programmes to support students with weaker basic skills on entry so that they can catch up with their peers.

An external review of governance, and of the college'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 first monitoring inspection on 19–20 January 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, reviewed information about pupil outcomes and work in pupils' books and checked the single central record. Meetings were held with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and its vice-chair, and the Chair and Chief Executive Officer (who is also the executive principal) of the Waverley Education Foundation Trust. The inspector joined the Principal and vice-principal in short visits to a number of lessons covering most subjects and all year groups.

Context

Since the last inspection, significant changes have been made to staffing, including the appointment of a new vice-principal, new middle leaders and new teachers in most subjects, and a new local governing body. The school is currently based in the sixth-form block of Waverley School but will shortly move to purpose-built premises locally.

Outcomes for pupils

School information suggests that the standards pupils reach and the rate of progress they make have improved since September 2015. School predictions indicate that 30% of current Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. Although this figure is well below the national average, it is a significant improvement on the 2% achieved in summer 2015, and is based on realistic estimates, given the assessment of pupils on entry to the school. In the current Year 11, 65% of pupils are predicted to make the progress they should in English by the end of year (compared with 24% in 2015). In mathematics, the prediction is 52% (compared with 21% in 2015).

Significant further improvement must still take place to ensure that all pupils make the progress they should, given their starting points. This applies to pupils overall and to particular groups of pupils, including female pupils, low-ability pupils, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs.

In 2015, the added value in all qualifications followed at Key Stage 5 was either above or at least in line with the national average. Current learning and progress of pupils at Key Stage 5 continue to improve.

Improving literacy and numeracy across the curriculum is a priority for the school and leaders are beginning to develop relevant whole-school strategies and to provide training for staff to address this.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The school is now almost fully staffed by permanent subject-specialist teachers who have high expectations about what pupils can achieve and how they should behave. This is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. In lessons observed, almost all pupils were engaged and keen to learn. They were respectful of each other and listened carefully to other pupils' answers and to their teachers' instructions and explanations.

Good relations are evident between teachers and pupils and there is a strong collegiate sense around the school. Pupils say they feel very well supported by their teachers, who they say 'go out of their way' to help them.

Despite improvement overall, the quality of teaching is variable. Where teaching is stronger, questioning is probing and pupils are encouraged to think hard and develop their ideas. However, in some lessons, teaching is aimed at the lowest ability and so not all pupils are sufficiently stretched.

There is a strong focus on developing effective marking, assessment and feedback so that pupils are clear about the quality of their work and how it can be improved. Early signs of impact on improving learning and the quality of work were evident in a scrutiny of pupils' work and in discussions with pupils about their work.

Increasingly, teachers are using the information about pupils' prior attainment to plan teaching and learning. However, this is still a significant area for development because there is not yet sufficient focus on the needs of different groups of pupils, which is reflected in the gaps in progress being made by different groups.

The school's higher-level teaching assistant and teaching assistant are deployed effectively where they are most needed to support pupils' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since September 2015, attendance rates have improved substantially and are now above the national average overall and for all groups of pupils. This is the result of highly effective monitoring activities. The prompt, daily response to non-attendance also contributes to keeping pupils safe. Persistent non-attendance has fallen significantly and is now below the national average overall and for all groups. Pupils' punctuality to school is improving.

The rate of exclusions has fallen. Alternative provision is no longer used because leaders judge that, where appropriate, individual pupils benefit more from the personalised curriculum and support programmes provided by the school.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is calm and respectful and pupils respond well to the high expectations staff have of them. Pupils wear their new uniforms with pride and talk with feeling about how they want to live up to the high expectations staff have of their behaviour and what they can achieve.

Staff provide effective support for pupils. In particular, learning coaches are highly respected by pupils for the moral support they provide and the impact their encouragement has on pupils' self-esteem.

Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal's actions to bring about improvement have been effective. She and other leaders understand clearly what needs to be done to improve the school and are firm about what to expect from staff and pupils. There is a very strong sense of community among staff, including leaders, teachers and support staff, and all are pulling in the same direction to improve outcomes for their pupils. Accurate self-evaluation, clear priorities and an improvement plan that informs strategic direction are helping leaders to keep focused on the school's improvement agenda.

A key priority for the school is to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make the progress they should. The external review of pupil premium funding, required by the previous inspection report, has not yet taken place. It is imperative that this takes place as soon as possible, and before the next special measures' monitoring visit. Its findings should then contribute to more effective use of the funding in order to promote and encourage improved achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Regular monitoring, tracking and reporting processes are now in place in relation to pupils' progress. The information generated by these processes is used to identify underperformance promptly and trigger interventions and support. Although these processes still need to be fully embedded, they are already beginning to have a positive impact on the progress pupils are making.

More rigorous systems to monitor and check the quality of teaching and learning are developing. This is currently undertaken mainly by the Principal and vice-principal, but support is in place to develop the skills and expertise of subject leaders so that they can contribute effectively to this process. More effective quality assurance processes, including external moderation by Waverley School and other local schools, are improving the accuracy of assessment. Appropriate support and development opportunities are provided for subject leaders and teachers.

Performance management is becoming more rigorous. A system of departmental review is developing to ensure subject leaders are accountable for performance in their areas of responsibility. The quality of teachers' performance is now being judged over time and is linked to the outcomes pupils achieve over time as well as to appropriate targets for professional development.

The curriculum ensures that pupils have opportunities to gain appropriate qualifications and take advantage of work experience. However, it does not yet focus sufficiently on the CREATE framework, a key element of the philosophy of studio schools. The Principal recognises this but is keen to ensure that pupils' basic achievement is improved first, so that they have a firm foundation for developing the important skills promoted by the CREATE framework. The progress made so far in improving pupils' achievement suggests that this approach is working.

New members of the local governing body are currently developing their expertise and understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The Chief Executive Officer of the Waverley Education Foundation Trust, who attends local governing body meetings, challenges school leaders robustly. An external review of governance, as required by the previous inspection report, has not yet taken place. It is imperative that this takes place as soon as possible, and before the next monitoring visit, to ensure that sound governance contributes as effectively as possible to the leadership and management of the school.

External support

Support is provided by the Waverley Education Foundation Trust, which includes Waverley School and Waverley Studio College. The extensive teaching and leadership support in place at the time of the last inspection has now gone. This is because Waverley Studio College now has a substantive, permanent team of staff who are having an increasingly positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes. Despite the well-judged and timely withdrawal of the previous support, the trust now needs to ensure that:

- it develops effective support for teachers and leaders to ensure that high-quality staff are motivated to remain with the school
- supportive processes are in place to review and validate the school's performance against targets in order to ensure that it is able to sustain the rate of improvement apparent since the Principal took over.