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29 October 2015

Miss Evelyn Forde
Principal
Ely College
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Dear Miss Forde

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ely College

Following my visit to your academy on 6 and 7 October 2015 with Jamie Clarke and Brenda Watson, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2015. The full list of 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Rapid Improvement Board, the Chief Executive of the CfBT Schools Trust, the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire, the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the sixth form, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have the subject knowledge to be able to assess students' progress accurately
 - make effective use of assessment information to organise their teaching to support the learning of students whose attainment is typically average, or below average, when they start at the academy
 - give students appropriate advice when marking work
 - help students to steadily build on their knowledge and skills so that they have the confidence to work hard and try their best in lessons
 - make effective use of teachers' questioning to help students use, extend and develop their knowledge and understanding across all subjects.

- Improve the rates of students' progress and raise attainment in all key stages by:
 - setting targets for students that are stretching but are also realistic and achievable
 - ensuring that all students are set work that is suitably challenging for them, especially those who are of typically average, or below average, ability
 - improving students' numeracy and written literacy skills in Key Stage 3 to help them succeed with the challenge of GCSE in Key Stage 4 and academic studies in the sixth form
 - making certain that leaders accurately assess the learning and progress of disadvantaged students to help them make rapid progress and narrow the attainment gap between them, their classmates and students nationally.

- Improve students' behaviour, safety and attitudes to learning by:
 - carrying out a review of procedures for managing students' behaviour in order to identify and deal with current weaknesses
 - reducing the high numbers of students who are removed from lessons within the academy on a daily basis
 - meeting with students to discuss their views about the management of behaviour and what can be done to support them to make the right choices

- consulting with younger students and those who are disabled, or who have special educational needs, in order to understand their concerns about their experiences at the academy, then act quickly upon this
 - restoring students' respect for their College Council so that they have confidence that it will work for them
 - improving the way students currently travel around the site to avoid congestion in some corridors
 - improving supervision throughout dining areas and ensuring that all staff on duty are confident in managing students' behaviour and in applying relevant policy
 - making sure that students understand the risks of sharing personal information online.
- Rapidly improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
- the immediate improvement of safeguarding; by ending current arrangements which allow adult visitors studying at the academy, who are not subject to safeguarding checks, to have opportunities for unsupervised access
 - making certain that all leaders evaluate the quality of teaching accurately by taking full account of students' learning in their work and in lessons
 - improving the management and use of student assessment information so that senior and subject leaders have an accurate view of the achievement of all students
 - ensuring that improvement plans are thorough, detailed and timed, so they support the long-term progress in students' learning, for both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4
 - making sure that the curriculum meets legal requirements for delivering religious education across Key Stage 4
 - requiring all leaders to establish clear monitoring arrangements to confirm the impact of their improvement planning
 - ensuring that appropriate professional development is provided for staff and that all teachers and leaders are subject to rigorous performance management arrangements
 - consulting widely with parents on future improvement plans and always acting quickly when parents raise a concern with the academy
 - increasing the capacity of governance, at all levels, so that all relevant duties can be fulfilled appropriately, without potential conflict of interest, so that leaders can be more effectively challenged and held to account.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6–7 October 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, inspectors met with the Principal and other members of the academy's leadership team, including the members of staff responsible for safeguarding and looked after children, and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. They also met with the Chair of the Rapid Improvement Board and a representative of the CfBT Trust. The inspectors scrutinised a range of academy documentation, which included the single central record of checks made on adults who work in the academy and student behaviour logs. The minutes from the most recent meeting of the Rapid Improvement Board, the academy's improvement plan and the Trust's statement of action were also evaluated. Inspectors observed teaching in 29 lessons, three of which were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors also met with students and looked at the work in their books. Inspectors spoke with staff about teaching, appraisal and other aspects of the academy's work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, 12 teachers have left the academy and four new teachers have been appointed. There are 10 teaching posts being advertised, which are currently filled by temporary appointments.

Outcomes for pupils

Achievement remains inadequate. Performance at A level was again weak in 2015 and the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and mathematics, decreased further and remains below the government's floor standards. The work seen in students' books indicates that levels of attainment across the academy remain well below where they should be. The rate of progress that most students are currently making is too slow.

Literacy levels, especially in writing, are too low across the academy. Teachers do not do enough to support the development of literacy skills, especially for those students who are in danger of underachieving. Beyond the start of Year 7, there is no systematic process for checking the progress that students are making in reading.

Not enough is being done to narrow the wide gaps that exist in the progress and attainment of different groups. The gap in performance at GCSE between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students grew wider in 2015. There are also significant weaknesses in the performance of boys, disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Many of the weaknesses in teaching that were identified at the inspection in March 2015 remain, and there is currently not enough teaching of good or better quality to raise standards rapidly enough. In most of the lessons seen during this inspection, students' progress was too slow. This was usually because teachers had not used information about what the students could already do when planning lessons. As a result, the teaching failed to build on students' prior knowledge, understanding and skills. In some lessons, teachers' weak subject knowledge also impeded progress.

Expectations across the academy are too low. For example, pupils in a Year 9 English class were observed completing work from the lower Key Stage 2 curriculum. The work seen in mathematics books also lacked challenge, with students often required to repeat simple tasks, rather than using and applying the skills and knowledge that they already possessed to solve problems.

Students' progress is limited by the poor quality of feedback they receive from teachers. Basic errors in grammar and punctuation often go unchecked and students continue to make the same mistakes as a result. Inspectors also saw many books where several consecutive pieces of work were left unmarked. Low standards of presentation regularly go unchallenged and this results in too few students having pride in their work. Students in Year 10 who spoke to inspectors about marking described variation in the quality and frequency of feedback that they received from teachers. They spoke of some subjects where marking was effective and helped them to improve, and other subjects where work was not marked or merely ticked, and homework often not returned to them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour continues to improve. Senior leaders have introduced a new discipline policy and this is helping teachers to manage students' behaviour more effectively. Teachers are now more competent at dealing with minor incidents, which allows lessons to flow more smoothly. The academy's records show that disruptive behaviour has reduced and incidents which lead to students being removed from class seldom happen. The academy no longer uses its own off-site provision for students who exhibit challenging behaviour.

Students generally behave well when moving around the academy between lessons and at break and lunchtimes. However, attitudes towards learning vary greatly depending upon which subject students are studying. Inspectors found few examples in books of students showing pride in their work. The exception to this was the art department where teachers assess students' work regularly and provide individual feedback to students about how to improve. Here, the work produced is generally of high quality.

Students spoken to during the inspection said that behaviour in the academy had improved. However, a small number of Year 9 students said that the longer lunchtimes had resulted in some students getting bored and some problems did occur. Students also said that bullying happens occasionally but that academy leaders deal with incidents well when they are reported.

Students are taught about staying safe when they are online and their awareness of internet safety has improved.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and governors do not have an accurate, well-informed understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the academy. Academy leaders have not done enough to tackle poor teaching and have not taken effective action to prevent the decline in progress and attainment of students. Achievement declined further in 2015, and the work seen across the academy during this inspection suggests that standards remain low, with little sign of improvement.

Despite the extremely large leadership team, there is insufficient focus from academy leaders on improving provision in English and mathematics. As standards continue to fall in these key areas, too little is being done by senior and middle leaders to improve teaching and learning. There is lack of urgency, and this is reflected in the academy's plans for improvement, which focus too much on short term checks and not enough on how all school leaders will support the rapid improvements that are necessary.

The new system that senior leaders have brought in to set targets for students' progress and attainment is not fit for purpose. GCSE target grades, which are stuck onto the back workbooks, are based entirely on the levels attained by students at the end of primary school. One student talked of being embarrassed by having target grades of 'F' in every subject. Students do not understand why these targets have been given to them and questioned inspectors about why their targets did not take any account of their current levels of attainment.

The review of pupil premium spending, which was recommended at the inspection in March 2015, has not yet resulted in a coherent plan for making more effective use of the additional funding. Whole-school improvement plans that senior leaders have developed do not identify how the attainment and progress of the different underperforming groups will be addressed.

The work of academy leaders in addressing safeguarding concerns has been effective. All visitors to the academy are now subject to relevant checks. There are good systems in place for reporting and recording concerns about students. Improvements to staffing deployment mean that students are well supervised when moving around the school between lessons and during break and lunchtimes.

A Rapid Improvement Board replaced the local governing body in July 2015. Members of the board are quickly developing an understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They receive regular reports from the Principal and are beginning to provide challenge to senior leaders; for example, they recently questioned the role of faculty leaders in monitoring teaching and supporting professional development. It is too early to judge the impact that this body is having on school improvement.

External support

The academy's sponsor, the CfBT Schools Trust, has not been effective in supporting the leadership or development of teaching and learning, nor has it been successful in halting the decline in standards seen at the academy over the past two years. The Trust has provided additional support to senior leaders recently. The Principal valued the work of the Trust's behaviour consultant, who played a key role in the development of the new behaviour system.

The statement of action has been improved and now contains milestones which enable academy leaders and governors to review the impact of actions taken. However, the academy failed to meet any of the student achievement targets that were set for the last academic year. The targets that have been set for the current school year will not be achieved unless senior leaders are able to rapidly secure significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning across the academy.