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Mr M Astley
Principal
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Fenton Manor
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Dear Mr Astley

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Peter's Academy

Following my visit with David Hughes and Robert Steed, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 8 and 9 March 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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.

I recommend that the school seeks to appoint newly qualified teachers only in the strongest faculties.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board, the chairman of the Woodard Academies Trust, the director of education for the diocese of Lichfield and the executive director of people, Stoke-on-Trent City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that the progress of all groups of students, particularly disadvantaged students and boys, is at least good, by ensuring that all:
 - students' literacy and numeracy skills are developed well in all subjects
 - work is planned to meet the needs of students, and takes account of their reading ages and what they already know and can do
 - lessons stimulate, engage and challenge all students well
 - teachers have high expectations of what all students, and in particular the most able, can achieve
 - teachers' questioning is probing and requires students to consider their answers and respond in full sentences
 - teachers implement the academy's marking policy and check that advice and guidance are followed.
- Ensure that the interim executive board (IEB) holds senior leaders to account for regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and providing accurate and timely information on the performance of staff and the progress of all groups of students.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring all leaders rigorously monitor teaching so that weaknesses are effectively addressed within robust performance management procedures
 - ensuring that the impact of additional funding, including the pupil premium and that for the Year 7 catch-up programme, is evaluated so that disadvantaged students benefit and gaps in attainment close
 - implementing a broad and balanced curriculum which provides good opportunities for students' personal development, in particular their understanding of how to avoid becoming vulnerable to influences of radicalisation and sexual grooming.
- An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other leaders and staff, groups of pupils, the chair of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative of the sponsor.

During the inspection, 25 responses to Parent View were considered and pupils and staff were spoken to on an informal basis. Pupils' work was looked at and inspectors made 22 visits to lessons, 16 of these with senior leaders. The lead inspector also made 18 short visits to classes with the new vice principal. The school's information about attendance, behaviour and the progress currently being made by pupils was analysed and the minutes of meetings of the IEB were also scrutinised.

Context

The leadership team has been reshaped. The responsibilities of two senior leaders have changed to focus on other aspects of the work of the school and a vice principal left in December 2015. A new vice principal began work at the school during the week of the monitoring inspection and new heads of English and mathematics joined in January 2016. In the absence of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), another member of staff has taken responsibility for the provision of pupils with special educational needs or disability. As the principal is now firmly established, the consultant who is employed to support him spends less time at the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal is now firmly established in this role. He is well respected by staff and pupils and has created a more ambitious culture within the school. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are taking action to secure further improvements. The senior leadership team is more effective than at the time of the last monitoring inspection.

Leaders have more clearly defined roles; they are held to closer account and most leaders are, in turn, offering appropriate support and challenge to the people whom they line-manage. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' progress have improved since September.

Improvements in procedures for managing the performance of teachers, which were evident at the time of the last visit, have been built on. Staff value the process and told inspectors that their practice has been enhanced by targeted support and training to develop identified areas of need. The impact of this was seen in the improvements individual staff have made in particular aspects of their work.

Middle leadership is developing. Some faculty heads are driving improvements in their areas and the fact that pastoral leaders are now focused on raising achievement is contributing to the more ambitious culture in the school. However, the quality of both subject and pastoral leadership remains variable and there is not yet a consistent approach to securing rapid improvement across the school.

As a result of some remaining weaknesses in leadership, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is still inconsistent. Some poor teaching remains and actions to improve some other areas within the school, for example attendance, have been largely ineffective. Senior leaders are aware of these areas for development and are taking further action to address them.

Supported by their own internal analysis, leaders have now taken action to address the recommendations of the external review of the school's use of pupil premium. Consequently, more targeted support for disadvantaged pupils, which has been in place since September, is leading to improved progress for this group. However, as pupil premium funding was not used effectively in the past and, as better teaching is leading to improved progress for all pupils, the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school remains.

The appropriate curriculum, commented on at the time of the last monitoring inspection, has been developed further. Pupils are now following courses which prepare them more effectively for the next stage of their education, employment or training, and timetabled lessons are supplemented by additional educational opportunities: some provided by outside organisations. For example, during this visit, external providers delivered sessions to allow Year 11 pupils to gain an accredited qualification in computing.

The curriculum also helps pupils to stay safe and, as commented on in the last letter, provides good opportunities for pupils' personal development. Pupils who spoke with inspectors know how to avoid becoming vulnerable to influences of radicalisation and sexual grooming.

Parental engagement continues to develop as a result of better communication. Information about the school and pupils is shared regularly with parents. The website is now up to date and reflects the work of the school more accurately.

Members of the IEB have the skills, knowledge and understanding to hold leaders to close account. They use the detailed, accurate and timely information they receive to ask relevant questions which focus on improving both the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are supporting action to make further improvements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve but inconsistencies remain within faculty areas and across the school. Weaknesses identified at the time of the last monitoring inspection are less common but they are still evident in a significant proportion of lessons.

Weaker teaching, which reflects low expectations of what pupils can do and a lack of challenge, leads to slow progress and a lack of engagement. This is often caused by poor planning which does not identify what pupils know and what they need to do next in order to learn effectively. Some teachers do not explain what is expected of the pupils with sufficient clarity, so pupils are unclear about the purpose of an activity. This slows the progress which pupils make.

However, there is a greater proportion of stronger teaching in the school. This is characterised by good-quality planning, high expectations, challenge for pupils of different abilities, engaging activities and clear explanations. This means more pupils are making better progress across a range of subjects than they were at the time of the last visit.

Teachers have a good subject knowledge and many use this to help pupils gain a better understanding of topics studied. Teaching assistants are now more focused on supporting learning, so the quality of their work has improved since the last monitoring inspection. The '6 Crafts', which focuses on improving identified areas of weakness, has given teachers a framework to build learning around. It has also made an important contribution to developing a more consistent approach to teaching.

Staff and pupils continue to enjoy positive relationships and these are now being used more frequently to promote pupils' confidence in exploring ideas and or working things out for themselves. This is still not consistent, but it is developing.

Questioning is used well in some lessons to deepen understanding but, at times, extended answers are not insisted on. This makes it difficult for teachers to gauge understanding and prompt further learning. On occasions, teachers accept one-word answers and they do not address incorrect use of spoken English. During visits to lessons, some teachers did not model good use of the spoken word and this needs to be addressed through the school's drive to improve literacy.

There is evidence of literacy development across subjects in pupils' books but this has not moved on significantly since the last visit. The promotion of numeracy across the curriculum is also underdeveloped. Leaders are aware of this and have plans to address these areas.

The marking policy, which is applied more consistently now, focuses on improving literacy. However, there are still clear variations in the quality of feedback which

pupils receive. Often, pupils use comments to improve their work and, in some books, the written dialogue between teacher and pupils is leading to rapid progress. However, in some cases, comments made by teachers are superficial and do not help pupils to learn more effectively.

As a result of action highlighted in the last monitoring inspection letter, assessment information in the school is now reliable. Leaders have a clear understanding of current levels of achievement and are using it to tackle underperformance. More teachers are using this information effectively to plan appropriate activities for pupils of different abilities but, as mentioned earlier, this is still not done consistently.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Positive features highlighted at the time of the last monitoring inspection have remained. Pupils are polite, courteous and generally conduct themselves in a sensible manner. Poor behaviour outside the classroom and in lessons is uncommon and pupils told inspectors that standards of behaviour have improved since September. However, pupils and staff reported that some inappropriate behaviour still takes place and pupils lose interest, which leads to off-task behaviour, in lessons which do not engage them.

Punctuality was an issue during the course of the monitoring inspection. A number of pupils were late to lessons and this was not challenged by class teachers. Pupils told inspectors that poor punctuality was rarely followed up and school records indicate that a significant number of pupils are late at the start of the day.

Fixed-term exclusions are higher than the national average, particularly for boys in Key Stage 4, but they have reduced slightly since the last full inspection. Permanent exclusions are also declining. The school's internal support provision for pupils at risk of exclusion has contributed to these reductions but systematic monitoring of procedures to improve behaviour has not taken place so leaders cannot fully assess the impact of various actions.

Pupils did not raise any concerns over bullying and felt it is dealt with effectively by staff when it does occur. However, records of incidents of bullying have not been analysed closely enough to enable leaders to identify patterns or take informed action to reduce bullying further.

Pupils feel safe in the school and effective systems are in place to ensure that pupils who attend alternative provision are safe, attend regularly, behave well and make sufficient progress. Alternative provision is used well by the school and, as a result, all pupils who attended off-site educational opportunities in 2015 moved onto employment, education or training once they left Year 11.

School leaders have not taken effective action to improve attendance. The principal is aware that systems and procedures to monitor and analyse patterns of attendance

and inform intervention strategies have lacked purpose and rigour. Consequently, the new vice principal will take a lead in this area.

Attendance has increased slightly since the time of the last full inspection but it remains below the national average. Attendance levels and persistent absence in Key Stage 4 are particularly concerning. Groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs or disability, have extremely high persistent absence rates. Too many pupils do not attend regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

The poor progress indicated by the provisional results from the 2015 public examinations has been confirmed by the published outcomes. A much smaller proportion of pupils in the school made the progress expected of them in English and mathematics than the national average and very few made rapid progress. Pupils in last year's Year 11 also made slow progress in other faculty areas, including science and languages, and attainment was low in a range of subjects. Consequently, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards.

These results were largely the consequence of inadequate teaching over time and ineffective leadership and management commented on in the last full inspection report. Predictions made by teachers were inaccurate and intervention to improve progress had little impact. However, the principal, supported by leaders at all levels, has taken effective action to address all of these issues and progress is improving significantly.

Relative strengths from 2015, including teaching and outcomes in humanities, have been built on and effective action has been taken to improve under-performing faculties. Robust systems are now in place for assessing and moderating pupils' work and this more accurate information is indicating that progress has improved markedly. Pupils in the current Year 11 are making similar progress to national averages in both English and mathematics and the school's internal assessments show improved outcomes for almost all groups of pupils, including the most able. Pupils of Pakistani heritage and those who speak English as an additional language are making particularly strong progress in the current Year 11.

Pupils in Year 10 are making similar progress to those in Year 11 but pupils with special educational needs or disability are making slow progress from their starting points in Key Stage 4. However, as a result of interventions that are now in place, this group is making much stronger progress in Key Stage 3. Action to improve outcomes for older pupils with special educational needs or disability are not yet having an impact.

As a result of targeted intervention, the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils in the school has improved across subjects and year groups. However, apart from English in Years 8 and 9, they are still not performing as well as their

classmates. School leaders are aware of this and they are taking further action to close the achievement gap.

With the exception of boys, particularly White British boys, pupils in Key Stage 3 are largely making the progress expected of them. School leaders are aware of this and plan to take informed action to address the underachievement of boys in Years 7, 8 and 9. Individuals have support plans and interventions are in place but this work needs to be a greater priority.

External support

Since the last visit, the school has received more effective support from the Woodard Academies Trust. The trust has continued to provide members and funding for the IEB, offered support and challenge through the trust partner and facilitated the partnership with an outstanding school. School leaders have also valued the support received from the human resources team and the finance director.

The trust has invested a significant amount of money in the school in order to improve outcomes. This has largely been used to fund interventions for the current Year 11 and has contributed to the improved progress within this year group. However, it is too early to fully evaluate the impact of this financial support.

The recently appointed chief education officer of the trust has the skills, knowledge and experience to offer appropriate support and challenge to school leaders. He is committed to helping to improve St Peter's Academy and has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. His focus is on improving the quality of teaching and improving outcomes for pupils. This is having a positive impact on the work of school leaders.