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1 October 2015

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 Brenda Watson and Jane Ladner, Ofsted Inspectors to your academy on 29 – 30 September 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 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 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly-qualified teachers.

The Trust's statement of action, currently in production, will be evaluated at the next visit.

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 Directors of 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 second monitoring inspection on 29 – 30 September 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Executive Principal, senior and middle leaders, two groups of students, three members of the Trust Board and a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector also met with some students in the sixth form, one of whom was accompanied by one of her parents.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, Paradigm Trust has taken over the running of the academy. A new Executive Principal has led the academy since the start of September 2015. Twenty-six teachers, four of whom were supply teachers on temporary contracts, left the academy at the end of the last term. A further three temporary teachers have left since the start of this term.

Outcomes for pupils

The new Trust inherited an academy with a history of underachievement. In 2015, overall results remained low and floor standards (the government's minimum expectations for the standards students achieve) were not met. All groups of students in Year 11 underachieved, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, and those eligible for free school meals. The percentage of Year 11 students attaining an A* to C grade in almost all subjects was well below national averages.

A significant minority of students who were taught off-site in a range of providers also underachieved; many of them made no progress at all in English and mathematics. Since September, senior leaders have ensured that students have been placed with different providers to ensure that they receive better quality teaching and support.

The proportion of Year 11 students making expected progress was low in English and notably low in mathematics. The progress made by other students in Years 7 to 10 remains unclear as senior leaders feel that the data collected throughout the year was inaccurate and unreliable. Senior leaders' scrutiny of teaching has revealed that the academy does not have robust procedures to gauge how well students are currently progressing. To tackle this, they have introduced testing to determine the prior attainment of every student. Once these starting points are known, plans are in place to ensure personal targets will be set and students' progress routinely monitored in all subjects and key stages.

Scrutinising students' books for evidence of progress revealed significant shortfalls in their basic literacy skills in Key Stages 3 and 4. Without these essential skills some students struggle to learn, and make little progress in lessons. To improve this, senior leaders have introduced changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum to give students more opportunities to develop these basic literacy and numeracy skills. New resources have also been introduced to teach reading systematically. Senior leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure students can use the essential basic skills in reading and writing to enable them to learn effectively and make better progress in all subjects.

The use of the pupil premium funding made little difference to the achievement of disadvantaged students in 2015. Far fewer of these students achieved five A* to C grades including English and mathematics compared with others in the academy, and the gap between their achievement and that of other students widened. Prior to September, no evaluation was carried out to show the full impact of the spending of this additional funding.

In the sixth form, the majority of students did not progress well enough. Of the small proportion of students who sat A-level examinations in 2015, almost all of them attained an A to E grade but only half attained higher A to C grades. All students studying vocational courses attained a pass grade and the large majority of them attained A to C grades. A minority of students entering the sixth form without at least a grade C in GCSE English or mathematics were not given the opportunity to re-sit examinations to improve their grades.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Observations of lessons by inspectors and work completed in books since the start of this term show that most students are making improved progress. This is largely dependent on the quality of teaching across and within subjects, which varies widely. Some students' books contain good quality work, neatly presented and marked by teachers. Others reveal that many of the key weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection remain. Work is left incomplete, is poorly presented, and contains common errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Where this occurs, these errors and the poor quality of some students' handwriting are left unchallenged by teachers.

Senior leaders have conveyed heightened expectations to staff, have provided training and given clear guidance to all teachers. As a result, some early signs of improvement are emerging. Some teachers are responding to these expectations by becoming more organised, with lesson plans that acknowledge students' different abilities and individual needs. They share with students at the start of lessons what they expect them to learn, raise their hands to get students' attention and apply the agreed procedures to manage their behaviour. Students are encouraged to talk with

their partners before answering questions. 'Check-out' tasks are used to confirm what students have learnt during the lesson. These strategies, encouraged by senior leaders, are enabling students to make improved progress.

However, these improvements are not sufficiently widespread and are undermined by the low expectations some teachers still have. At times, teaching is too dull and fails to capture students' interest. When this happens the pace of learning slows and substantial amounts of lesson time are not used effectively. Teachers question students to test their understanding but often accept the first response, rather than encouraging more students to try to answer. Not all teachers understand fully their roles in reinforcing students' basic literacy skills.

Where they do not have an accurate view of students' starting points, teachers are unable to plan learning that matches their abilities. The pace of learning and progress made slows because less-able students lack the basic literacy skills to get on with their work, and more-able students are left unchallenged. For example, much of the work set in mathematics is manageable, rather than challenging and, for some, it is far too easy. In geography, less able students' work is not checked regularly to see if they are coping and making enough progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Raised expectations of students' behaviour, punctuality and attendance are leading to some improvement. Since the start of this term, most students have attended regularly. Only one fixed-term exclusion has taken place. Records show that several students continue to arrive late but they also show that this is improving as students realise that lateness leads to detention.

Students say that behaviour has improved this term. They have noted the stricter uniform code and the consequences for poor behaviour applied by teachers. They also said that some low-level disruption continues to occur in lessons, usually by the same small minority of students. Inspectors found that students' conduct in the buildings and outside during break and lunchtimes is generally calm and orderly. Students say that, in general, they feel safe on the academy site but bullying does occur and, when it does, not all of them are convinced that if they tell a teacher it will be tackled and fully resolved.

Casual attitudes to learning are evident in some lessons that fail to stimulate students' interest. Questions are usually answered by those who are keen to learn, leaving others to sit back and contribute very little in lessons. A small minority of students know that they can get away with doing the bare minimum and take little pride in the quality of their presentation because teachers do not challenge them about this.

A programme of daily tutorials introduced since September is ensuring that most students bring with them the right equipment to learn, and meet the academy's new expectation about wearing uniform correctly. However, these tutorials are not used well enough to address gaps in students' reading and writing skills. Reading for pleasure, particularly amongst those in Key Stage 4 has a low profile. There is no clear timetable for setting and marking homework. Some students feel they get too much homework, others say they do not get enough.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The Executive Principal has acted swiftly to find out the academy's strengths and weaknesses, raise expectations of students, and increase the accountability of staff. She has shared her ambitions for the academy and the need for all staff to raise their game to help achieve this. A team of senior leaders, strengthened by the Trust's leadership and management consultant and an extended network of advisers, has made improving the quality of teaching and learning its top priority. A full review of the effectiveness of all teachers and teaching assistants is under way. At this stage it is unclear what contribution all middle leaders and managers are making to driving improvements to the quality of teaching and improving outcomes for their students.

The academy Trust has had too little time, since it took over in September, to impact on student progress and achievement. Nonetheless, the fresh start, under new leadership and with a number of staff changes, has clearly signalled higher expectations and a determination to root out weaknesses in provision. Initial evaluation of the work of the academy by the new senior leadership team accurately highlights the challenges ahead if outcomes for students are to improve quickly. Leaders recognise that securing sufficient improvement for the removal of special measures within the expected timescale presents a formidable challenge.

Safeguarding arrangements remain secure. Procedures to manage challenging behaviour have been revised to ensure that teachers take responsibility for managing off-task behaviour. Students are only removed from lessons once the agreed procedures have been utilised fully. There is an increased presence of senior staff 'out and about' at break and lunchtimes to supervise behaviour.

No new students joined the sixth form this September. Very few students remain in Years 13 and 14, making sixth-form provision unviable. The academy is working closely with other local providers to ensure that these remaining students are able to continue their education and receive the teaching and support they need to achieve their target grades. However, the reasons for these changes have not been communicated effectively and, understandably, are causing concern amongst students, their parents and carers.

The members of the Trust's Board are knowledgeable, and have proven experience in school improvement. They show a clear, realistic understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses, and of what is needed to improve it. They have prioritised getting the academy open, operating and fully staffed. At the time of the inspection the Trust did not have a statement of action. The Trust intends to put a statement of action and improvement plan in place, once a detailed analysis of the academy's strengths and weaknesses has been carried out by senior leaders. An Interim Executive Board will be established over the next few weeks to oversee this and to monitor the academy's improvement. An academy council, consisting of a small number of local representatives, remains in place to strengthen governance.

External support

The academy has not sought additional external support because it is able to draw on the wider resources of the Trust to steer its improvement. The guidance, support and increased accountability from the sponsor Trust is adding rigour to the academy's monitoring procedures and improvement planning.

The Executive Principal has moved quickly to establish a new relationship with the local authority. Progress has already been made in identifying other local schools who can support the academy's development, in brokering partnerships and providing additional advisory support. The academy Trust has commissioned external consultants to assess the quality of teaching and learning and quality-assure the views of senior leaders about the academy's effectiveness. A second review is planned for November 2015.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make rapid and sustained improvements to the quality of teaching across the entire academy by tackling systematically all of the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection.
- Ensure that the concerns raised by a few sixth-form students about the quality of teaching provided for them are resolved fully, to their satisfaction.
- Before the next monitoring inspection, put in place a statement of action and an improvement plan that will steer the academy's rapid improvement.