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21 June 2016

Mrs Tina Graham  
Principal  
Dartmouth Academy  
Milton Lane  
Dartmouth  
Devon  
TQ6 9HW

Dear Mrs Graham

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Dartmouth Academy**

Following my visit with Paul Garvey and Paul Winterton, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 7–8 June 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose. The interim advisory committee has already used a broad range of external support which has provided detailed information about the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose. The senior leaders' regular evaluation of the plan indicates that appropriate actions are underway to tackle each of the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers in the secondary phase as the quality of teaching and learning is too uneven, but that it does seek to appoint newly qualified teachers in the primary phase.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim advisory committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2015.**

- Improve pupils' outcomes by taking rigorous and rapid action to drive up achievement:
  - for disadvantaged pupils across the academy
  - for boys, so that their progress and attainment matches that of girls by the end of Key Stage 4
  - in mathematics, particularly in pupils' use and understanding of number in the primary phase
  - in the sixth form, so that pupils complete their courses successfully
  - in the primary phase, so that pupils have the skills they need to thrive in the secondary phase
  - across all subjects in the secondary phase, so that inconsistencies are eliminated and pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and more is outstanding by:
  - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations, including of how pupils present and complete their work
  - identifying the needs of disadvantaged pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
  - ensuring that teachers check pupils' understanding, put right misconceptions and move learning on more quickly
  - placing a relentless focus on developing pupils' literacy skills
  - ensuring the accuracy and reliability of assessment information, including in the sixth form, and making sure that teachers use this to challenge all groups of pupils in every lesson.
- Improve pupils' behaviour so that, in every lesson, pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress.
- Urgently improve the procedures for recording the use of restraint. Make sure that leaders use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of support for pupils and reduce the use of restraint over time.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management, and governance, by:
  - implementing a sharply focused action plan to address the academy's weaknesses, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken
  - clarifying the long-term future of the sixth form provision
  - developing an academy-wide strategy for improving pupils' literacy skills
  - ensuring a rigorous approach to checking the quality of teaching and responding rapidly to weaknesses identified
  - tracking carefully patterns in the achievement, attendance and behaviour of different groups of pupils across the academy, and taking swift and effective action in response

- ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make better progress, particularly in the secondary phase
- making sure that governors play a full and effective part in challenging academy leaders to bring about rapid improvement.

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

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 7–8 June 2016**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other leaders and managers, groups of pupils, the chair of the interim advisory committee (IAC) and the chief executive officer (CEO) of Academies South West multi-academy trust.

### **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection, an IAC has replaced the governing body until a local governing board is established. An appointment has been made to the post of substantive principal. Leadership roles and responsibilities have been reviewed. New appointments have been made to the posts of primary phase leadership, and numeracy and literacy subject leaders. New leaders for mathematics and science have been appointed for September 2016.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The IAC has been reviewed by an external consultant. Through its ensuing action plan, the committee has ensured that it has, and will continue to, appoint personnel with appropriate expertise and knowledge to play a full and effective part in challenging school leaders to bring about rapid improvement. The IAC has surveyed the views of parents and staff, and commissioned a range of external audits, including on the school's use of the pupil premium. The information has enabled it to evaluate accurately and in depth the school's provision and outcomes, and to challenge school improvement. For example, the IAC has challenged senior leaders to improve the use of pupil premium funding to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, the school is implementing strategies to meet the pupils' needs more specifically, and its information on current pupils who are disadvantaged indicates that the gap between their progress and others in the school is beginning to close in the secondary phase.

The IAC has rightly made it a priority to secure effective arrangements for safeguarding pupils. It has carried out a detailed audit of the school's work in this regard. It has reviewed the audit to make sure that policies and procedures are comprehensive and up to date and that staff are fully trained, including in preventing radicalisation and extremism. In particular, the IAC has ensured that the school's procedures for recording the use of restraint have improved, although they need to be refined, and that leaders are using the information to evaluate the effectiveness of support for pupils. Identified staff, although not yet all staff, have recently undertaken training in the use of restraint. Pupils say they feel safe in the school. They are taught how to keep safe, including from bullying and when using social media.

The principal, supported very effectively by the trust's CEO, is raising expectations of staff and parents of what the pupils can achieve. She has shared with them her vision of an outstanding education for all. She has provided clear direction for staff through written expectations of teaching and learning, and more challenging targets for pupils' progress. Aply supported by other senior leaders, and staff who have been seconded from other academies in the trust, the principal is implementing the school's improvement plan well. The plan is focused sharply on addressing the school's weaknesses and contains clear timelines. The IAC, chief education officer, principal and other senior leaders monitor and evaluate progress against the identified actions each half term to ensure that they are carried out effectively and at the right time. For example, a very comprehensive school-wide strategy for improving pupils' literacy skills has been introduced in all lessons, with varying success. Leaders have identified the need to share the best practice in lessons and to refine the support provided for specific pupils.

The CEO, principal and senior leaders have temporarily closed the very small sixth form as it did not provide a suitable range of qualifications or a consistently good quality of teaching and learning. They have managed the process effectively. They ensured that the impartial information, advice and guidance provided for Year 11 students during the last academic year, and for the current students in Years 13 and 14, have secured appropriate education, employment or training for almost all the young people. The majority of students who would be in Year 12 attend courses at the local further education college or in other academies within the trust. The remaining students in Years 13 and 14 say they feel well informed and prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. The trust's business manager and the principal have secured the school's finances and made sure that the budget is balanced.

The principal is establishing robust systems and procedures, including a rigorous approach to checking the quality of teaching. As a result, weak teaching is being eliminated. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress in general. However, the monitoring of teaching does not focus enough on its impact on the progress of pupil groups, including the most able, disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability, to secure their consistently good progress across the school. Nonetheless, improved systems for tracking patterns in the achievement, attendance and behaviour of different groups of pupils across the school is helping leaders to identify weaknesses in these areas and to put in place appropriate support and intervention.

The principal is developing the leadership skills of senior leaders. Much of the work has been implemented by the principal and senior leaders because middle leaders' skills have not yet been developed to enable them to play their part in full. Subject leaders are not skilled in monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' work in books and on their progress information in order to develop the quality of teaching and learning and ensure that it is consistently good across subjects.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teachers are responding well to the higher expectations set by more challenging targets for pupils' progress and by the clear expectations of teaching and learning. They are all applying the school's new requirements for marking and providing feedback on pupils' work, although not all teachers are checking that pupils are making the required improvements. In turn, more pupils are taking care over the presentation and completion of their work. However, many pupils struggle with poor handwriting. The cursive style learned by younger pupils is not reinforced across the school.

Improvements in the school's system for tracking pupils' progress are helping teachers to identify pupil groups, including disadvantaged pupils. In an increasing number of lessons, disadvantaged pupils are receiving effective support, particularly in developing their literacy skills. For example, the work produced by a disadvantaged pupil since September in Year 11 history lessons shows an increased maturity in sentence structure, a wider use of vocabulary and improvements in organising paragraphs. In keeping with the school's literacy policy, displays in the history classroom provided guidance in these areas and the teacher's feedback in marking the pupil's work included a specific focus on how to improve his writing skills. Not all teachers are providing such precise guidance for pupils.

The accuracy and reliability of assessment information is improving due to more rigorous checking and moderation, including across schools within the trust. However, not all teachers are using the information to challenge all groups of pupils in lessons, particularly the disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs or disability and the most able. In too many subjects, teachers are not checking pupils' understanding and adapting the lesson to help those who have not understood, while at the same time deepening the learning of those who have grasped the lesson quickly.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The school appears calm and orderly. Most pupils are considerate and polite towards others. They adopt safe practices in practical subjects such as science. The majority of pupils behave well around the site and in lessons. They are developing better attitudes to learning in lessons that provide the right level of challenge and interest for each of them. However, records indicate that the behaviour of a small minority of pupils across the school continues to require improvement. To support staff in managing this, senior leaders have recently launched a reviewed behaviour policy. In addition, a specific programme to support pupils identified with behavioural needs has been established. The impact of the school's monitoring of the behaviour and attendance of different groups of pupils can be seen in the improving attendance of girls and disadvantaged pupils, although not yet in the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. There is little difference between groups in relation to exclusions and detentions, both of which are reducing overall. Pupils are punctual to school and to lessons.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

As indicated above, outcomes are beginning to improve for some pupils, particularly where teachers assess the progress of individuals and groups in lessons and adapt their teaching accordingly. Pupils' progress over time, as seen in their books and in the school's progress tracking information indicates that disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress to others across the secondary phase, although the gap in their attainment remains wide at key stage 4. Their progress is not so strong in the primary phase, especially in writing. The information indicates that boys in Year 11 are achieving as well as girls, because of appropriate intervention, but that this is not the case in other years across the school. Due to effective training in mathematics for teachers in the primary phase, pupils' use and understanding of number is improving. However, achievement in mathematics, reading and particularly writing in the primary phase is not yet high enough to provide pupils with the skills they need to thrive in the secondary phase. Achievement in the secondary phase remains too variable across subjects. The remaining students in the sixth form have completed their courses, although it is too early to know if they have been successful.

## **External support**

Good-quality external support provided by the trust is having a positive impact on school improvement. Leaders and managers from across the trust are supporting the principal in modelling expectations for other senior leaders and staff within the school. They are also supporting the implementation of robust systems and procedures, such as the evaluation of progress information for pupil groups. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are being raised through working with staff in the trust and other schools, for example in preparing schemes of learning.

## **Priorities for further improvement – a focused summary of the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection**

- Use the expertise across the trust and within the school to develop teachers' skills in checking pupils' understanding in lessons and in adapting their strategies to ensure that all, particularly boys, disadvantaged pupils, the most able and those who have special educational needs or disability, make equally good progress throughout the school.
- Ensure that the literacy policy is implemented equally well across the school. In particular, develop the literacy skills of disadvantaged pupils.
- Develop the skills of senior and subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' progress, through triangulating lessons with analysis of pupils' books and progress information for all groups. Make sure the leaders use this information to hold teachers to account for pupils' progress, to develop a consistently good quality of teaching and learning and to secure accurate and reliable assessment data.



- Develop senior and middle leaders' skills in monitoring and evaluating pupils' attitudes to learning, their behaviour and attendance, and in ensuring that logs such as the restraint log are completed thoroughly. Ensure that they use this information to improve these areas and to make sure that pupils complete and present their work to a high standard.
- Continue to engage all leaders and managers, including the IAC, in evaluating and refining the school action plan.