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Mr M Astley
Principal
St Peter's Academy
Fenton Manor
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Dear Mr Astley

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Peter's Academy

Following my visit with Alan Johnson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school 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.

I recommend that the school only seeks to appoint newly qualified teachers 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2016

Evidence

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

During the inspection, 25 responses to Parent View and 237 responses to the school's parental questionnaire were considered. Pupils' work was reviewed and inspectors made 20 short visits to lessons; all of these visits were with senior leaders. 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

Woodard Academies Trust received a pre-warning notice from the Department for Education in December 2015 and plans are in place for their sponsorship to end. A new sponsor has been approached to continue to work, with Diocese of Lichfield as co-sponsors of the school.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the assistant principal with responsibility for student development has stepped down to become a full-time teacher of English. The recently appointed vice-principal now leads on areas linked to personal development, behaviour and welfare and, as leadership capacity has improved, the consultant employed to support the principal left soon after the last visit.

Two teachers of mathematics and an English teacher have left the school since the last monitoring inspection and a teacher of mathematics and a teacher of English have been appointed. A support member of staff joined the school in May and a higher-level teaching assistant returned from maternity leave in June. Two teachers plan to return from maternity leave in July 2016.

Five teachers are due to leave at the end of term and the school has vacancies for a teacher of mathematics, a teacher of geography and a teacher of religious education. Until suitable applicants are found, these posts will be covered internally or by supply staff.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal has taken decisive action to improve the school. Senior leaders' clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses has informed their actions to secure further improvements to the quality of education. Actions have been taken to address all the areas for improvement identified in January 2015. For example, as mentioned in the previous monitoring inspection letter, the curriculum has improved

and the rigorous monitoring of teaching has sharpened the school's strategies to address identified weaknesses. Consequently, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' progress have improved since the last monitoring inspection.

The new vice-principal is firmly established and provides strong leadership for her areas of responsibility. She has taken effective action to improve attendance and punctuality. The recently introduced methods of recording behaviour provide a more secure system to analyse patterns of behaviour and inform further action. However, it is too early to fully evaluate the impact of this system.

The vice-principal with responsibility for raising standards has developed an effective system for tracking the progress of individuals and groups of pupils. As a result, school leaders have a clear understanding of the rates of progress of all pupils in a range of subjects across all year groups. They are using this information well to inform action to improve progress for specific groups and individuals.

The quality of faculty and pastoral leadership continues to improve. It is particularly strong in humanities, science and key stage 4, and, although not yet having a marked impact on outcomes, the leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to improve. However, some middle leaders are not yet securing rapid improvements in their areas of responsibility. Consequently, senior leaders are providing targeted support and training to ensure that this aspect of leadership has a more consistently positive impact.

Additional funding has been used effectively to improve the progress of targeted pupils. Year 7 catch-up funding has been used for mentoring, literacy and numeracy intervention and targeted reading programmes. Pupil premium funding has been used to improve progress and raise aspirations of pupils. For example, during the monitoring inspection a group of Year 10 pupils visited Keele University. Although attainment gaps remain, the progress of these pupils has increased.

The active promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and of fundamental British values is a real strength of the school. As a result of theme days, assemblies, input from a range of guest speakers, drama productions, posters around the school and coverage across the curriculum, pupils are able to talk confidently about respect, tolerance, the rule of law, democracy and individual liberty.

Pupils learn about all the major world religions and use this to help them prepare for life in modern Britain. For example, Year 10 pupils looked for similarities between Christianity, Judaism and Islam as part of their religious education lessons.

Since the last monitoring visit, pupils have voted to name the houses in the school; they selected names of local pottery firms and representatives from these companies

have been invited into the school. One is due to speak at the forthcoming prize giving event.

SMSC is developed effectively through the personal, social, health education curriculum and opportunities to promote all aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are identified in every subject area. SMSC is developed particularly well in humanities and science. For example, there is a timeline celebrating aspects of British culture in the humanities area and pupils have considered changing views about the universe in science.

School leaders have ensured that there is a culture of keeping children's safe and the arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Appropriate checks have taken place on newly appointed staff and they have been given up-to-date safeguarding training as part of their induction process.

Parental engagement continues to improve as a result of better communication. Parents are informed about their children's achievements and parental enquiries are usually responded to very quickly. Information about the school and pupils is shared regularly with parents. Responses to the school's parental questionnaire, based upon the questions asked on Parent View, are extremely positive: a very large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire believe that the school is well led and managed and they would recommend the school to another parent.

An increasing number of parents are attending events at the school. More parents are attending parents evenings, celebratory events and open evenings and mornings. School staff also conduct home visits and meet parents off-site when required. Almost all parents have been extremely supportive of the school's work to improve punctuality, homework and uniform.

Members of the interim executive board (IEB) continue to hold leaders closely to account. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are supporting action to bring about further improvements. Members receive comprehensive reports from school leaders and the trust. They challenge this information through incisive questions and use it to ensure that leaders take further action to improve the school.

Meetings of the IEB, which are well attended, focus upon improving the quality of education in the school. Minutes of their meetings indicate that they consider all aspects of the school's provision including the quality of teaching, pupils' progress, the impact of the pupil premium, safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the promotion of fundamental British values and the impact of leadership and management at all levels. Governance has improved considerably since January 2015.

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 some subjects and year groups.

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

The school's new systems with clear expectations for behaviour and learning are valued by staff and pupils, but they are not yet fully embedded. Most pupils are keen to learn but their interest wanes when teaching fails to engage them in the learning. This puts a ceiling on pupils' progress.

Teachers' planning has improved since the time of the last visit. In line with the school's policy, the seating plans in every class provide staff with information including pupils' reading ages, what they know and what they can do, pupils' targets, their attendance, their ethnicity, whether they speak English as an additional language and if they are supported by the pupil premium. Where teaching is most effective, staff are using this information well to aid their planning.

Staff and pupils now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. There is greater challenge, particularly for the most able, in an increasing proportion of lessons. Time is used more effectively and more pupils know what they are expected to achieve and what they need to do to improve. In some lessons, peer and self-assessment are used well to support learning and effective peer support was observed during the inspection in an information communication technology (ICT) lesson. This helped pupils to make more effective progress.

Questioning is now used more effectively to deepen understanding and more staff are targeting particular questions to specific pupils. More often than in the past, extended answers are insisted upon and teachers are modelling the good use of spoken English and addressing the incorrect use of English. However, despite the drive to improve speaking and listening, some staff are still not ensuring that pupils speak confidently when giving oral responses in class.

The promotion of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum has improved since the time of the last visit. Numeracy still lags behind literacy, but it is developing. As there are 'literacy walls' in every classroom, key words on display and posters around the school that show what staff are reading, there is an increased awareness of the importance of literacy throughout the school.

Pupils value the improvement in teachers' marking. Most of their work is marked regularly and includes a focus upon developing literacy. Almost all staff are following the school's marking policy, but its impact varies. School leaders believe that feedback is most effective when it has a clear purpose and offers precise guidance to which pupils respond. However, it is evident that not all staff are giving pupils useful next steps to improve their work and some staff do not check that pupils have responded to their comments. Leaders believe that this is an important aspect of teachers' responsibilities which needs further development.

A new system for setting and recording homework has been introduced since the last monitoring inspection. However, this is not yet fully developed and the quality and quantity of what is set varies between subjects and year groups. This is another aspect of the school's work which leaders acknowledge as needing further improvement.

The quality of learning which takes place during tutor time varies considerably. Where it is most effective, tutors use the time productively to deliver well-planned opportunities to support learning. During the inspection, pupils benefited from sessions designed to promote literacy, numeracy and their understanding of fundamental British values. However, in some sessions, time was wasted and very little learning took place. Once again, leaders know that this is an area that needs to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

During the monitoring inspection pupils conducted themselves in a sensible manner. They told inspectors that behaviour has continued to improve and that they value the higher expectations of standards of behaviour in the school. The new 'behaviour for learning framework' provides a clear structure for managing behaviour and pupils were positive about its impact and believe that in most circumstances it is used consistently and fairly. They usually work well with staff and other pupils.

However, pupils told inspectors that some pupils do not behave well for teachers who do not usually teach them. It is evident that pupils are not fully engaged in some lessons. Where teaching is less effective, pupils do not concentrate as well as they are able. They lose interest when teachers do not give them opportunities to think about things carefully, work things out for themselves or lead learning activities.

There have been no permanent exclusions since the autumn term and fixed-term exclusions have declined since the last monitoring inspection. The school's internal support provision for pupils at risk of exclusion has contributed to these reductions and systematic monitoring of procedures to improve behaviour is now taking place.

Bullying is rare and systems for recording and analysing incidents of bullying have improved. Leaders are now able to identify patterns and take informed action to reduce bullying further. Pupils are confident that staff would deal with any unkindness quickly and effectively if it did occur.

The welfare of pupils is promoted effectively in the school. The site is secure and pupils are taught to be safe and feel safe. Attendance has improved since the time of the last visit and it is highest in Years 7 and 8. However, it is much lower in Year 10 and among some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and White British boys, who are absent more frequently than other groups of pupils in the school. Consequently, attendance is still below the national average.

As a result of concerted effort to challenge lateness, there has been a marked improvement in punctuality at the start of the school day. Action has also been taken to reduce lateness to lessons. Pupils value this and now understand the importance of punctuality. Parents and pupils also appreciate the school's work to ensure that all pupils are wearing their uniform correctly. Pupils are proud of their school and now wear their uniform with pride.

The vast majority of parents whose views were known to inspectors believe that their children are happy and safe in school, that bullying is dealt with effectively and that the school responds well to any concerns that they raise. Almost all feel that their children are well looked after in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

As a result of improved teaching and more robust systems for assessing and moderating pupils' work, school leaders are predicting improved outcomes in GCSE examinations in 2016. However, the school's internal information indicates that inconsistencies remain. There are relative strengths in biology, chemistry, physics, business and communication, child development and the European computer driving licence, but predicted outcomes in computer science, ICT, resistant materials and core and additional science are weaker.

Progress has improved in English and mathematics in Year 11 and a higher proportion of the most able pupils are predicted to achieve the top grades in a range of subjects this year. However, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, White British boys and disadvantaged pupils have made slower progress than other groups of pupils. These groups also underperform in Year 10.

Pupils with English as an additional language have made faster progress than others in key stage 4 and pupils with low prior attainment have made rapid progress in Year 10. Once again, this illustrates the inconsistencies that remain.

The school's progress information and evidence seen in pupils' books indicate that all groups of pupils are making improved progress across a range of subjects in Years 7 and 8. Progress is particularly strong in humanities in Year 9. However, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make slower progress from their starting points than other groups of pupils in Years 9 and 7 and they make slow progress in mathematics in Year 8.

Evidence provided by the school indicates that progress in mathematics is slower than in other subjects in Year 9 and disadvantaged pupils perform less well than others in mathematics throughout key stage 3. Boys outperform girls in mathematics in years 8 and 9, but girls' achievement remains higher than that of boys in English in key stage 3.

Although improving, progress is inconsistent and different groups of pupils are still not making the progress of which they are capable in a number of subjects across all year groups.

External support

Woodard Academies Trust has continued to provide members for the IEB, offered support and challenge through the trust partner and has provided the strong support of the human resources team and the finance director.

School leaders believe that the financial support provided by the current sponsor has contributed to improved progress in Year 11, but the effectiveness of this support on pupils' achievement cannot be determined until the 2016 GCSE outcomes are known.

The chief education officer of the trust has continued to offer appropriate support and challenge to school leaders. He has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has focused upon improving the quality of teaching and outcomes in the school. This has helped school leaders to improve the school.