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Mr Gerry Batty
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Dear Mr Batty

Special measures monitoring inspection of Acle Academy

Following my visit with John Randall, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 July 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 December 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2015.

- Improve teaching and outcomes for all pupils, by:
 - providing teachers with accurate assessment information which they then use well to plan interesting and inspiring lessons that challenge pupils of all abilities
 - ensuring that pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are developed well in all subjects.

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - increasing the capacity of leaders to bring about change
 - accelerating the work begun by the acting headteacher to restore an ethos which is characterised by high expectations of all pupils by all staff
 - establishing priorities for improvement, based on an accurate understanding of the work of the academy, that have clear timescales and measurable targets
 - ensuring that middle leaders are clearly accountable, well trained and are leading effectively
 - making sure that all pupils' progress is accurately monitored, including that of those who are disadvantaged and are the most able
 - accelerating the implementation of the actions outlined in the recent review of pupil premium spending
 - ensuring that the individual needs of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are diagnosed effectively and that teachers plan lessons that take account of those needs
 - reviewing and amending the curriculum to ensure that it builds on the prior learning and capabilities of all pupils and prepares them for life in modern Britain
 - ensuring that staff understand and apply all academy policies consistently, including those on behaviour and feedback
 - ensuring that the governing body provides robust challenge and support.

- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
 - urgently addressing pupils' lack of confidence in how adults deal with bullying timely and effectively
 - further developing the work to improve attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers without the agreement of one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 July 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited lessons, scrutinised documents, and undertook a work scrutiny. Additionally, the inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the senior leadership team, the data manager, middle leaders, a group of staff and groups of pupils. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with the chair of governors and the regional schools commissioner.

Context

In the period since the last inspection, there has been considerable turbulence in senior and middle leadership, with changes in roles, leadership positions unfilled and new appointments made for September. There is currently no head of school or headteacher. A new head has been appointed for September 2016. There are plans in place for Acle Academy to join the Wensum Trust in autumn 2016. The trust has already started to provide some support for the school ahead of the planned sponsorship. As part of this support, the chief executive officer has acted as the executive headteacher on a limited basis from January 2016, and then on four days per week since April 2016, alongside his other roles at the Hellesdon School and with the trust.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The upheavals in leadership since the last inspection have undermined the school's capacity to make necessary improvement. Leaders have been too stretched, and have been unable to work on the many urgent priorities. Progress against each of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection is minimal. Leadership remains fragile because, although recent changes to the senior leadership have brought some improvement, these positions are not yet well established. Consequently, although there have been some more recent improvements, the school has not made rapid enough progress in the six months since the inspection.

When the school was inspected in December 2015, establishing a rigorous system of assessment so that leaders could monitor pupils' progress accurately was left as a priority for improvement. Six months later, leaders are still unable to make an effective and efficient analysis of how pupils are progressing from their various starting points in different year groups. Currently, there are a number of systems being used to try to give leaders more information about assessment. However, these systems work separately from one another and do not provide all the information that leaders require in order to assess how well pupils are progressing. At the time of this inspection, not all leaders were using the school's assessment system, nor were they aware of how to use it. New assessment systems are being

created for use in September 2016. These have been devised thoughtfully and in a careful and considered way. This work has been led well by the data manager in liaison with middle leaders and with support from the Wensum Trust.

Middle leaders, including subject leaders, have not been sufficiently held to account for behaviour, teaching and achievement. Since the previous inspection, middle leaders have faced uncertainty in their line management and have only recently begun to have regular, rigorous line management meetings.

Leaders have not improved the quality of teaching rapidly enough since the previous inspection. There was no information made available to the inspection team about how teaching and learning were being monitored prior to the appointment of the new deputy headteacher. Since April, more rigorous systems have been introduced to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. These are now beginning to identify and improve weaker teaching. However, leaders do not use current assessment information on pupils' progress thoroughly enough when making decisions about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not improved since the previous inspection. Leaders acknowledge that the individual needs of these pupils are not being accurately assessed or supported in lessons and that the current support plans are too generic in the targets that they set. Pupil and parent/ carer input is not sought when targets are set. The information shown to inspectors about these pupils in English, mathematics and science indicated that these pupils were not being monitored effectively or making enough progress. An external review of this provision has been undertaken in recent months and leaders are using this to create an action plan for improvement.

Leaders acknowledge that their evaluation of the effect of the funding that they receive for disadvantaged pupils is not yet sufficiently rigorous. The school has used money to support disadvantaged pupils, especially in Year 11 with examination support. The effectiveness of this spending has not been evaluated. Furthermore, there is currently no evaluation of the Year 7 catch-up funding.

Governance, while improving, does not yet provide sufficient challenge and support to Acle Academy. While the governors show a deeper analysis and awareness of the school's work, they still do not challenge or question enough about the accuracy of assessment, the decisions around some areas of leadership, and the impact of the school's work on bullying.

The small number of parents who have completed surveys on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) are not positive about the school. Leaders have introduced parent forums which a few parents attend. They have held two consultation evenings with parents over the future of the school, and meetings with prospective Year 5 and 6 parents. However, leaders do not have any further evidence about how they are gathering the views of parents, carers and pupils to improve the work that they do.

Staff are well trained in the most up-to-date guidance on safeguarding and referrals for pupils who are vulnerable are timely and proportionate. Pupils say that they feel safe and that there is someone on the school site that they would speak to if they had concerns.

The website was not compliant with current requirements at the time of the inspection. A number of policies related to curriculum, behaviour and special educational needs and/or disabilities are either not in date, or are not reflective of the school's most recent practice. There is no governor register of business interests and there is no evaluation of how the Year 7 catch-up funding is being spent. The values and ethos statement refers to an older and out-of-date Ofsted report. Some links from the website were listed as 'not found', including the link to the Department for Education performance tables. Other information, while compliant, is not easily accessible for a parent or carer trying to contact or find out information about the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving but too many weaknesses reported at the last inspection persist. The expectations about what pupils can achieve vary widely by class, and pupils are consequently not being challenged sufficiently in lessons. There are too many examples of pupils undertaking work that is too easy. The different assessment systems in place mean that staff are sometimes confused. This makes it difficult for teachers to accurately assess and effectively plan the next steps in pupils' learning to ensure that pupils are making progress.

Assessment has not improved quickly enough. Too many pupils do not know what they do well, whether they are improving, or what they need to do to get better. The guidance and feedback given to pupils also varies widely. Questioning, too often, is not developing pupils' understanding or challenging them to extend or deepen their learning. Peer evaluation, where it is used, is often not effective or checked by teachers for its accuracy. Expectations on the completion and quality of the work produced are not being challenged enough by teachers. Although some examples of more effective and accurate assessment were seen, this is still too variable in lessons. Recent guidance from leaders about whole-school systems for marking and feedback are beginning to help support teachers to use feedback more consistently. The effect is not yet seen on pupils' progress.

The quality of teaching has not been strengthened quickly enough. Areas of teaching, such as the development of literacy and support for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are not developing at a rapid enough rate. Too many pupils have some understanding of a topic, but are unable to express themselves clearly in their written responses as they do not have the literacy skills to do so. Teachers do not provide them with enough support to improve in this area because they are not given enough guidance about how to best

support the specific needs of pupils. Consequently, pupils are not making enough progress.

Pupils told inspectors about the poorer learning experiences that they have, especially when there is temporary cover teaching over a period of time. While leaders have had to use short-term or temporary cover teaching this year, they report that they do not require this level of cover from September as they have successfully recruited to fill almost every teaching position.

Although many challenges face the school, staff work hard to try to improve the quality of education, despite the lack of consistent, high-quality line management to support them. Most notable is the dedication of the English team, who have worked collectively to try to establish standard assessment formats, for this year and next year, even without subject leadership. This dedication has not gone unnoticed by pupils, who were very complimentary about the quality of their experience in English, especially in Years 9 and 10. Almost all said that their English lessons were their best lessons, where staff cared and worked hard to make lessons interesting and give them guidance about how to improve.

The focus and emphasis by the new deputy headteacher on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is making a positive difference to the practice of individual teachers. However, this work is still in its early stages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' records show that overall attendance has improved in the school and that persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils is reducing rapidly. Leaders can provide case-by-case examples of the work that they do, especially at year team level, to improve the attendance and reduce the persistent absence of pupils. However, overall rates of attendance for Year 9 girls, Year 11 pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, and many pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remain far too low. Management information systems make it challenging for leaders to be able to analyse their information by year group and as a result it is difficult to analyse their overall impact on attendance and in reducing persistent absence.

Leaders' use of fixed-term exclusion and isolation is reducing but this information is not being analysed sufficiently by leaders to see what it tells them about the effectiveness of their work. For example, bullying logs are recording incidents but not being used to assess whether the school is effective in supporting the most vulnerable pupils.

Leaders have yet to implement effective systems to ensure that staff consistently apply school policies on behaviour. Although some pupils say that behaviour has improved, too many pupils said that poor behaviour was too often disrupting their learning, most notably in middle and lower sets, and that they did not have

confidence in all staff to deal with this effectively. The behaviour policy that was on the website at the time of the inspection had not been reviewed since its adoption and did not reflect the current practice at the school. It also used terminology that was not appropriate to setting an expectation of mutual respect between staff and pupils. Pupils did say that there are teachers who 'stand out' as being supportive and caring, who control the class well and plan interesting and engaging activities, and it was most notably in those lessons where they learn well.

Leaders have yet to improve pupils' confidence to trust in how adults deal with bullying. Leaders have implemented and advertised the use of their 'toot-toot' programme as a way of giving more confidence to pupils about how to report bullying. However, almost all pupils said that they would not use this programme willingly as it was not truly anonymous. Aside from the frequency of its use, the 'toot-toot' programme is not challenged or analysed enough by leaders and governors to see how effective it is or what difference it makes to pupils' behaviour.

Leaders have yet to review the curriculum to ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Some pupils were critical of life skills lessons and how they were preparing them to be better citizens in modern Britain. Some older pupils commented that they want greater communication from leaders about the large number of changes in their school and wanted more opportunities to voice their opinions and ideas, especially around opportunities to be involved in community and charity work. However, pupils were looking forward to an extended assembly on global citizenship and social conscience, which has been planned and supported by a number of pupils within the school. This occurred during the inspection and was an excellent example of leaders' recent careful planning which gave pupils thought-provoking content on a range of issues.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders are confident that results for Year 11 are likely to improve in 2016. However, owing to the gaps in the pupils' knowledge from their previous experiences, leaders have set targets that are not aspirational for this cohort. Equally, these targets have been lowered again between March and June 2016.

Despite the concerns raised in the previous inspection about the accuracy of 2015 predictions, and assessment, there has only been one external moderation of English, mathematics and science in January 2016 for Year 11. Minutes from the 'Challenge Board' meetings also indicate some concerns over the monitoring and accuracy of this assessment and over a severe lack of progress being made by some year groups.

Leaders are not able to accurately identify where pupils are making progress in all year groups, from their different starting points. The inconsistency in the use of assessment systems makes it difficult for leaders to evaluate their effectiveness in improving achievement for all pupils.

External support

Plans are in place for the Wensum Trust to become the academy sponsors for Acle Academy in autumn 2016. However, owing to the school's lack of leadership capacity since the previous inspection, the trust has given support to the school. This includes the support of an executive headteacher for four days per week, coaching and mentoring for leaders from high-performing leaders at the Hellesdon School and external reviews, so that the school has an accurate audit of its provision. The trust has also taken over and re-formed a 'Challenge Board' to improve the quality of governance at the school. The chair of the trust and chief executive officer have also worked hard to try to secure funding for Acle Academy for essential resources and development.

The school also accesses the Norfolk 'better to best' programme and support from a local teaching school.