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Mrs Helen Watts
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Dear Mrs Watts

Special measures monitoring inspection of Acle Academy

Following my visit with Jeremy Rowe, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 22–23 March 2017, 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 December 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers in geography and mathematics at this point in time.

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 academy does not appoint newly qualified teachers without the agreement of one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 22 March 2017 to 23 March 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited lessons, reviewed documents, and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in key stage 3 in a range of subjects. The lead inspector also undertook work scrutiny and learning walks with the head of school, assistant headteacher for achievement, and the special educational needs coordinator. Additionally, the inspectors met with the head of school, the senior leadership team, and middle leaders, as well as pupils. Inspectors reviewed parental views through a range of activities, including telephone calls and meetings. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer of the trust.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, in January 2017, a new assistant headteacher for personal development, behaviour and safety has joined the school. Two new internal roles for lead professionals have also been created to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. A new deputy headteacher for teaching, learning and assessment has been appointed, and is due to join the school in the summer term 2017. The trust has also recruited a fully operational local governing body, which has been in place since February 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders are acting with urgency to drive forward improvements in the school since the previous monitoring inspection. Leaders continue to use the school's improvement plan routinely to evaluate their own effectiveness in bringing about improvement. They remain realistic and honest in their evaluation, especially about where provision is still not good enough. Consequently, they continue to have an insightful understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision.

The head of school has further secured more permanent staffing at senior leadership level and strengthened the line management system since the previous monitoring inspection. Middle leaders are very positive about the clarity, transparency and higher expectations that this line management system brings to their work to raise standards. Middle leaders are now looking more routinely at lessons, pupils' work and their own assessment information to make judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their own areas. However, the overall quality of middle leadership remains inconsistent, and this will be a central focus of the next monitoring inspection.

Following the previous monitoring inspection, The Wensum Trust ensured that a local governing body was recruited swiftly, but carefully. New governors bring a

passion for the school community, and wealth of expertise, including parental voice and local authority experience. However, leaders acknowledge that governors still require more training and support so that they can all understand the information that they receive, most notably about pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils.

The head of school is resolute in her belief that pupils enter the school with attainment that is in line with the national average, and so should receive opportunities that build on this fully. Consequently, she has challenged leaders to develop the curriculum for next year with an emphasis on academic rigour, while ensuring that pupils access creative and technical subjects effectively. The curriculum will further increase the numbers of pupils who can access the EBACC curriculum (English Baccalaureate, a government measure of achievement), while developing more vocational provision in-school, to meet pupils' aspirations and interests.

Leaders have implemented high-quality intervention for pupils in English and mathematics, most notably for Year 7 pupils who need to catch up. Pupils who spoke to inspectors were enthusiastic about the things that they were learning in these sessions and how this was making them more confident in their lessons. Leaders are now also in the early stages of developing more meaningful ways to raise disadvantaged pupils' aspirations early on in their school experience, and engage them more in careers advice and guidance.

The special educational needs coordinator has been supported by the trust and the local cluster coordinator to review the backlog of cases that she inherited when she first took up her post. She now has a thorough understanding of the issues facing the team to secure better-quality provision for pupils. She is using this understanding to make assessments for education, health and care plans for pupils, some of which are long overdue. However, leaders acknowledge that they need to do more to gain the confidence of a small number of parents who are understandably frustrated that the provision does not yet meet the specific needs of their children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

In order to further improve training for teachers, the head of school has created two new positions of 'lead professionals'. The lead professionals have quickly established methods to get staff to share best practice, and to support teachers where they need help in developing their own teaching. The school's own records indicate a steady improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Inspection evidence confirms this.

Staff are using the school's agreed assessment and feedback procedures with much greater consistency than in the previous monitoring inspection. Pupils are using this guidance more frequently to make improvements to their work. Staff are also using

'learning questions' and 'mastery challenges' to raise pupils' expectations and understanding about what they can achieve in their lessons. Most pupils could explain to inspectors how the guidance that they receive from teachers was helping them to improve and/or catch up in something that they had struggled with.

Although teaching is steadily improving, there is still not enough that brings about good progress for pupils from their starting points. There are not consistently high enough expectations among all staff about what pupils can achieve, especially at key stage 3. Equally, too often, teachers do not respond to the emerging needs of pupils in lessons, especially those who are struggling, or for those who find the work too easy. Although almost all pupils are behaving appropriately, lessons do not yet consistently ensure that pupils are getting the most out of their learning time.

Leaders are working hard on providing more specific guidance to teachers about how to meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, but this is not yet well-established. Adults are not working with enough consistent, mutual understanding about effective strategies to help these pupils learn more effectively. Consequently, these pupils, especially those from middle-attaining starting points, are not yet making good enough progress in a range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The new assistant headteacher for personal development, behaviour and well-being has quickly gained a thorough understanding of the school's provision. He is refining systems so that leaders have a better knowledge and overview of what is working well, and what needs to improve. He has been well supported by the consultant assistant headteacher who is working with the school to ensure smooth transition for all new leaders.

As the designated safeguarding lead, the assistant headteacher works well alongside the two deputy designated leaders, to support the most vulnerable pupils. The safeguarding systems are being constantly refined so that they give leaders even more information on vulnerable pupils. The new personal assistant to the executive team has quickly developed an insightful view of safeguarding, and is supporting the continued administration around this aspect of the school's work. Governors linked to safeguarding are frequent visitors to the school. They check the single central record of staffing checks, and look at the school's referral log, to ensure that case files are being maintained well, and effectively.

During the visit, behaviour in lessons and around the school was calm and orderly. Pupils are generally happy and feel safe. Pupils who spoke to inspectors continued to say that they felt the school was improving and that the much simpler behaviour system was effective in the main. Pupils say, and the school's own records show, that there is still a small core of poorer behaviour most notably in the lower-ability classes. Leaders are currently reviewing the reasons behind this. This will be a focus of the next monitoring inspection.

While the school can show clear evidence of positive improvements in the attendance of individual pupils, and a reduction in persistent absence, too many pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are not attending well enough yet. While leaders have worked hard to support those pupils with the lowest attendance, they acknowledge that there is still a lot more that can be put in place, especially for pupils who are on the 'borderline' of poorer attendance. They also acknowledge that some of their administration on the checks for pupils with low attendance needs to be recorded more precisely.

Although leaders keep pupils safe, they acknowledge that without a 'named' leader for some aspects of site safety and security, there is a potential vulnerability in safeguarding. The trust and leaders are currently deciding how to resolve this issue and it will be a focus of the next monitoring inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

The school continues to take suitable steps to validate the accuracy of its assessment, including external expertise to moderate teachers' assessments. Staff use assessment with increasing confidence and rigour. Leaders are able to use the assessment information to pinpoint which pupils need support to catch up, and effectively plan and deliver appropriate intervention. Leaders are ensuring that this is not just in Year 11, but across year groups for disadvantaged pupils, so that they can be helped earlier to catch up with others nationally. Senior and middle leaders continue to develop work scrutiny so that they can make even smarter analysis of pupils' achievements against their starting points.

External support

The trust's data manager continues to be highly effective as a hands-on support for leaders in further refining assessment systems, and in ensuring that leaders have appropriate information by which to evaluate themselves against the national standards. His work provides an essential backdrop to quality assuring leaders' evaluation of standards in the school.

The trust has continued to support the school well since the previous monitoring inspection. The trust has supported the head of school to recruit to senior and middle leader positions where it has been appropriate, continued to mentor and train new leaders, and are currently supporting leaders to undertake the staffing restructure of support staff. The trust has also been instrumental in actively recruiting the new local governing body.