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Mrs Helen Watts
Head of school
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Dear Mrs Watts

Special measures monitoring inspection of Acle Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 13–14 September 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the academy 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees (academies), the chief executive officer, 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 13 September 2017 to 14 September 2017

Evidence

The lead inspector undertook learning walks with the head of school, assistant head of school and special educational needs coordinator. The inspector also met formally with the head of school, the senior leadership team, middle leaders and groups of pupils. Various school documents were scrutinised, including information about safeguarding, achievement, pupil premium and the school's own self-evaluation and development plan. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer and chair of The Wensum Trust.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, in March 2017, a new deputy headteacher has started at the school. There have also been some new teaching appointments, most notably in mathematics. The school has also undergone a support staff restructure.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and governors have not maintained a sense of urgency or pace in how they raise standards in the most vital and weakest elements of the school's provision. Since the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have not acted with sufficient pace to raise the standards of teaching and learning, middle leadership, literacy, disadvantaged pupils' provision, pupils' literacy, and the provision for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders' impact on raising pupils' attendance has also not been rapid enough. The improvements identified in the monitoring inspections in December 2016 and March 2017 have slowed considerably.

The head of school, while passionate, diligent and committed to the pupils in her care, has not had sufficient capacity to continue to drive up standards over the summer term. In particular, her work around a restructure of support staff has reduced her ability to continue to quality-assure the work taking place in the school. As a result, the sense of urgency towards school improvement which she brought when she first arrived at the school has not been maintained.

The trust has not ensured that the local governing body has developed quickly enough. The local governing body was established a few weeks prior to the previous monitoring inspection. Over a term later, this group does not yet have sufficient understanding of the work of the school and is still not holding school leaders to account precisely enough over the progress of pupils, the spending of additional funding, the impact of the work that is being undertaken, or the compliance of the school's website. The trust has not ensured that the local governing body is sufficiently robust and strategic in its work to present meaningful challenge to leaders that makes a real difference to pupils' provision in the school.

Leaders have addressed the issues around protocols for visitors and site safety which required some clarity following the previous monitoring inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving, but too slowly. Too many weaknesses persist. Despite work by middle leaders in the summer term to develop curriculum and assessment across key stages 3 and 4, teachers do not use ongoing assessment well enough to set work that challenges pupils to achieve more. Too often, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve remain too low. Too many pupils, from starting points that are typical for their age, are working at a pedestrian pace, and are not developing skills and knowledge quickly enough. This often results in pupils undertaking work that does not challenge them to think extensively, or is too easy for them. Not enough teaching quickly identifies and supports pupils when they are struggling, or finding work too easy, as this occurs in the lesson. This is because teachers are not consistently reviewing the ongoing learning in lessons.

The support in classrooms for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains too weak. Leaders have undertaken extensive work to create 'passports' for pupils, which identify things to support their learning. However, these passports focus overtly on pupils' welfare needs, with little, if any, attention paid to their academic needs and progress. There is no effective guide to teachers about the specific learning needs of individual pupils, and how to meet these needs in lessons. Leaders have not taken adequate account of these pupils in their monitoring of teaching and learning. The judgements that have been made about teaching are still overly focused on the performance of the teacher, rather than the impact on the learning of the pupils, or groups of pupils, in the classroom. This focus is not helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning quickly enough.

Subject leaders are not yet having a consistently effective or significant impact in raising the quality of teaching and learning in their areas. Although they are, in the main, using the school's systems for quality assurance, they are not doing this with sufficient rigour. For example, their reviews of pupils' work in their books for the summer term do not focus adequately on pupils' progress from their starting points. As a result, they are too often overly optimistic about the impact of teaching on the learning of pupils. Some leaders have been hampered in their ability to undertake this quality-assurance work in their departments, owing to staffing turbulence in the summer term. Where this occurred, the quality of teaching and learning dipped considerably. This is most notable in mathematics, where leaders are only just being able to implement the school's monitoring processes, having only acquired a stable staffing since September 2017. Middle leaders were not able to provide a convincing picture that these leadership activities are making a real and rapid difference to pupils' learning across the school.

The whole-school leadership and development of literacy, and the development of reading, remains an area of weakness in the school. There is no evidence of this

having moved on since the previous monitoring inspection, or improving the outcomes for pupils in classrooms.

However, pupils are far more positive about their experiences in almost all of their lessons. Pupils who spoke to the lead inspector commented that they felt that teachers cared for them and that the quality of their teaching had improved a lot since they had first joined the school. Moreover, the quality of provision and leadership in English remains a real strength of the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' work around pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare has been more effective since the previous monitoring inspection. For example, leaders have worked with pupils and staff to collectively create a new whole-school vision 'respect, aspiration, and determination'. This, alongside the consultation and implementation of a new uniform for pupils in Years 7 to 10, has brought a greater sense of solidarity and community from pupils about their school. Pupils are wearing their new uniform with pride and are positive about the improvements in the school.

Pupils' involvement in applying and being voted in as a 'house captain' in one of the school's new four team houses, or as a prefect, has brought a greater level of engagement and ownership from pupils in their own school. Although new since September, these pupils are incredibly enthusiastic about the opportunities that this is starting to give them to have a 'voice' in the school. The concerns raised by pupils in the last full inspection in December 2015 about staff's inability to deal with bullying is a far cry from the positive commentary made by current pupils about their staff now. In particular, pupils who spoke to the lead inspector heaped praise on the 'engage' team of staff, who are available all day to support pupils' specific concerns and needs around wider school issues, such as friendship issues or anxieties.

Although the classroom provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not sufficiently improved, the work of the leader to ensure that the right pupils get additional support through a successful application for an education, health and care plan has been more successful. The department's move into the school's library has also been managed, although leaders still have much work to do to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils use this provision confidently and that this opportunity offers the wider specialist support and care that these pupils need.

The attendance of pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, remains an area of concern. The actions taken by the new assistant headteacher in the late part of the summer term are showing early indications of having some impact on a small number of these pupils. However, the evidence provided by school leaders in previous monitoring inspections about the impact of their work has not demonstrated a significant impact on the attendance of groups of pupils in 2016/17. This evidence, alongside

the current overall attendance of pupils in the first week back to school, does not provide a convincing picture that school leaders' actions are making rapid enough in-roads on pupils' understanding about the importance of attending school.

Outcomes for pupils

The improvements in the 2016 outcomes in the combined areas of English and mathematics appear to have been maintained in the Year 11 results in 2017. The number of Year 11 pupils in 2017 who achieved a grade four to nine in English and mathematics combined was broadly in line with the numbers of pupils who achieved a good pass in both subjects in 2016. Moreover, attainment in a number of subjects also rose in 2017, such as English and geography, and remains at least in line with the national averages for attainment in those subjects. Early indications show that almost all pupils from this year group have gone on to a next-step destination in education, training or employment. The school is in the process of ensuring that these pupils have arrived at these provisions.

While attainment in Year 11 in other subjects, such as resistant materials, rose in 2017, this was from a very low starting point, and achievement in these subjects remains low by comparison to the national average. Equally, attainment in subjects such as history and information and communication technology fell considerably, with proportionally large cohorts of pupils taking these qualifications. Although there is no current nationally validated progress data that can be used to assess pupils' progress, leaders' own internal school information suggests that many pupils did not make the progress of which they were capable, or that the school expected them to in these subjects.

The achievement of disadvantaged pupils in 2017, who made up approximately 20% of the Year 11 group, was not strong. Only 33% of these pupils managed to achieve a grade four to nine in English and mathematics combined. This is a 23% decrease in the percentage of pupils who achieved a grade C or above in both these subjects in 2016. The attainment of these pupils in an array of other subjects would also appear to be low. From broadly average starting points, these pupils have not achieved well.

School leaders identify a series of contextual reasons that have impeded the school's improvement. However, the disappointing results in some subjects and for disadvantaged pupils reflect that the actions taken by leaders have not made the impact required to raise the quality of teaching or pupils' achievement. At the time of the inspection, it was too early to review the impact of leaders' responses to the 2017 outcomes. However, although still very early in the term, middle leaders' initial understanding of where performance is causing concern is not consistently sharp enough. The school's own information indicates that disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are improving in key stage 3, namely in the foundation subjects. However, this was not borne out in the evidence seen both in the learning walks during the inspection, or in the evidence seen from leaders' own monitoring of the quality of teaching.

In particular, the actions taken by leaders to ensure that disadvantaged pupils in the remainder of the school achieve well have not been rigorous. Leaders did not provide clear evidence that they have taken any meaningful actions or had any impact on improving disadvantaged pupils' achievement since the previous monitoring inspection. Leaders and governors are confused over the spending and impact of the additional funding that they received for pupils in this time.

External support

The school draws on guidance from a number of external sources, especially about the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and in safeguarding.

Most support comes directly from The Wensum Trust, including the financing of the deputy headteacher and the support for data and achievement systems. In particular, the trust is in the process of trying to secure greater financial stability and management for the school. However, this support from the trust has not had sufficient impact since the previous monitoring inspection to raise standards rapidly enough in the school. In particular, the trust has not ensured that the school is accessing, understanding and using the pupil premium effectively enough. Moreover, the trust has not done enough to ensure that the local governing body is being sufficiently rigorous in its work in challenging leaders on areas that need more rapid improvement.

During the time of the inspection, the school was mid-way through a pupil premium review led by an external consultant, being paid for via the trust.