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Ms Tracy Brogan
Ernulf Academy
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Dear Ms Brogan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ernulf Academy

Following my visit to your school on 1 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- rapidly diminish the differences between disadvantaged pupils' progress and the progress of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally
- continue to strengthen the leadership skills of middle leaders so that they make a consistently strong contribution towards rapid school improvement
- ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and planning for learning so that pupils make good progress across all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, the chair of the local governing body and one other governor, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

I visited a number of lessons across a range of subjects, some of which were observed jointly with you, and also reviewed a range of school improvement documentation. I also scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment checks of staff.

Context

The St Neots Learning Partnership has recently been served with a pre-termination warning notice by the Department for Education (DfE) which suggests that it might be appropriate to seek an alternative trust to sponsor the school. The school is now deemed to be a 'coasting school' as defined by the DfE, as it has met the coasting definition for the last three consecutive years.

Arrangements for governance were changed in June 2017 when a local governing body for the school was put in place. A full-time acting deputy headteacher and an acting assistant headteacher were appointed in September 2017. Five new teachers were appointed in September 2017 and four new teachers in January 2018. Thirteen members of the support staff have been made redundant. The school is currently running on a budget deficit.

Main findings

The school has faced a number of challenges since the previous inspection which have acted as barriers to rapidly improving the provision. Many middle leaders are either new to post or are receiving support to develop their leadership. Some teaching is also not yet consistently good and requires improvement. Some senior leaders' roles include duties which would typically be carried out by middle leaders. These factors have stalled the rate of progress made by the school with little time remaining before its reinspection later this year.

Pupils made below-average progress from their starting points at the end of key stage 4 in 2017. Disadvantaged pupils' progress was well below that made by their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. Progress made by all pupils in English, mathematics, science and humanities was significantly below the national average.

Your school improvement planning processes have rightly identified the weaknesses of the previous academic year, and you have planned actions which are measured for impact at various times throughout the year. Some of these actions are already starting to make a difference, while for others it is too early to demonstrate sustainable impact.

You have improved the quality of the careers guidance provided to pupils in key stage 3, and now have in place a detailed programme for all pupils in Years 7 to 11. You also occasionally suspend the normal timetable to cover this topic, as well as including aspects of careers education in form time. Pupils in key stage 4 spoke positively about their work experience placements and demonstrated a good awareness of the different routes available to them when they leave school.

In order to hold middle leaders more to account, including the special educational needs coordinator, senior leaders meet with these colleagues regularly. More detailed and challenging discussions take place about pupils' progress following the half-termly assessments of pupils' progress. These meetings allow for an analysis of the performance of different groups of pupils. Greater discussion now takes place across subject areas regarding the progress made by individual pupils. Support for your less-experienced subject leaders continues to be made available.

The restructuring of the governing body to include a local governing body means that this group is able to focus more closely on raising standards in this school. My scrutiny of meeting agendas shows that members have taken on responsibility for looking more deeply into the causes of previous underachievement, and the impact of strategies leaders have put in place to address this. The trust has also used the expertise which exists in its other secondary provider, Longsands Academy, to provide support for some of the weaknesses identified in Ernulf Academy.

You have worked more closely with the nearby primary schools to accurately identify pupils' literacy and numeracy skills when they join your school in Year 7. You build on pupils' prior knowledge in Year 7 and pupils confirmed this in their responses to your survey conducted at the end of October 2017. You acknowledge that there is still inconsistency in the quality of teachers' planning across a range of subjects. Subject leaders are responsible for ensuring greater consistency in the quality of planning, and while some of these are experienced and are able confidently to contribute towards school improvement, others still require support from specialist leaders of education to develop and strengthen their leadership. All subject improvement plans tie in more closely with your whole-school priorities and all teachers have bespoke training packages this year based on their individual needs. You have provided all teachers with three opportunities during the year to be released from their teaching to engage in alternative activities to develop their own practice. You have also staged after-school training sessions for teachers to help them develop their subject expertise, and to better meet the needs of your most-able pupils. Your own monitoring shows that this group of pupils are achieving better than previously. Pupils also have the opportunity to give their views on the teaching they experience through the teaching and learning committee of the school council.

On the day of this inspection, which coincided with World Book Day, you had arranged a competition to promote reading, and all pupils in Years 7 and 8 received a complimentary book. All pupils in Years 7 to 10 are expected to read once a week in form time, and you have identified a number of reading leaders in Year 10. This scheme has increased the confidence of both the leaders and the pupils whom they help.

Your own records of behaviour monitoring in lessons indicate a reduction in the number of incidents of low-level disruptive behaviour. All disadvantaged pupils have achieved at least a bronze award for their behaviour. You have also worked hard to engage parents in supporting you with their children's behaviour, and regularly send

letters home congratulating pupils for their positive attitudes to learning. These raised expectations have also led to a reduction in referrals to your isolation room, and also in the proportion of pupils who are excluded from school, including those pupils who are disadvantaged. The number of repeat exclusions has also decreased compared to the same period last year.

While pupils' progress has been unacceptably low over time, your own assessment systems indicate that the pace of progress has started to pick up. You now identify and support pupils who are at risk of falling behind in a more timely way. You also use assemblies and form time to emphasise the importance of regular attendance and how this is linked to achievement.

My visits to lessons showed that most teachers are aware of the different groups of pupils in their classes, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are disadvantaged and the most able pupils. Some teachers plan suitable tasks of varying challenge to meet the needs of these pupils. My discussion with some of your most-able pupils, however, suggests that some teachers do not always consistently meet their needs when planning for learning. You have wisely done some work with pupils in key stage 3 about how they learn, and how this links to progress, although you acknowledge further work is required on this aspect. Some pupils told me that a few teachers are 'set in their ways' in how they teach, and that this acts as a barrier to their learning. You are aware of this, and are coaching these teachers with a view to exploring a range of different styles which secure equally positive outcomes. You also target disadvantaged pupils with various support strategies, have investigated ways of remodelling home learning in key stage 4, provide additional support classes in mathematics in Year 11 and have planned for master classes in English during the Easter holiday.

You have also reviewed the subjects and qualifications you offer so that they meet the needs of your pupils better. Hence, you have increased the number of vocational qualifications on offer to pupils. These include: health and social care; food and nutrition; music performance; and dance. Discussions are also underway to increase the number of English and mathematics lessons next academic year.

External support

The local authority conducted a performance review of the school in January 2018 with a focus on disadvantaged pupils. The review speaks positively about the senior leaders' accurate view of the improvements required, and about their drive to achieve these aims. The review validates the school's priorities for improvement and accurately identifies next steps the school should be taking.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector