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Mrs Lisa Walton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Walton

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ripley Academy

Following my visit with Bernadette Green, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 March 2018, 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 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 June 2017.

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.

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 am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to 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 Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2017.

- Improve the quality of teaching across all year groups by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high enough expectations for what pupils can achieve across all subjects and year groups
 - plan activities that meet the needs of all groups of pupils effectively, especially the most able and those who are disadvantaged
 - use the school's systems for managing behaviour consistently well and that lessons consistently engage pupils in their learning
 - check carefully that pupils have learned and understood things before moving them on to the next topic.
- Raise achievement across the school, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is accurate
 - ensuring that target setting and monitoring of pupils' progress is robust and aspirational, including in the sixth form
 - sharing current best practice within the school and across the trust effectively.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - evaluations made by leaders at all levels are accurate
 - subject leaders and those with other roles of responsibility have sufficient training and skills to carry out their roles effectively
 - external moderation of work across the trust is systematic and robust
 - the use of extra funding to support disadvantaged pupils is rigorously evaluated
 - the governing body and academy trust are more effective at holding leaders to account by checking more carefully that agreed actions have had sufficient impact.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 7 March and 8 March 2018

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, a member of support staff and a group of staff. They also met with the chair and vice-chair of the local governing body and representatives of the trust. Inspectors met formally with a group of pupils and spoke to others informally around school and in their lessons during the course of the two days. Inspectors visited parts of 24 lessons, many with senior leaders, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses observed. They also visited a tutor session and observed an assembly. They looked at a sample of pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups and also looked at pupils' work in their lessons. Inspectors considered a variety of documents, including improvement plans, records of monitoring activities, information about pupils' progress and attainment, records relating to attendance and behaviour and information about safeguarding arrangements. They also read minutes of meetings of the local governing body and the parents' forum, and looked at a range of school policies and information published on the school website.

Context

At the time of the last inspection, the headteacher and the head of school had been in post for one week. Since then, the headteacher has re-structured the leadership team. One of the deputy headteachers and one of the assistant headteachers have left the school. Six teachers have also left the school. The headteacher has appointed four heads of house who oversee pupils' progress and well-being. Heads of house also have a whole-school responsibility relating to areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection. Four new teachers, including a new head of science, have joined the school since the last inspection. A further four teachers have been appointed and are due to take up their posts later in the year. This includes a new head of computer science.

The school is part of the East Midlands Education Trust (EMET). Following the inspection in June 2017, the board of trustees took the decision to appoint the local governing body (LGB) of another school in the trust as the LGB for The Ripley Academy. Governance is provided by the EMET and the LGB.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has been instrumental in bringing about considerable improvements to all aspects of the school. She has instilled a sense of belief in pupils and staff and shared her high expectations of all those involved in the school. There is a renewed sense of purpose that permeates the school. The headteacher is extremely aspirational for pupils' success and holds their interests at the heart of all she does. The headteacher is ably supported by senior leaders who share her commitment to bring about continued and sustained improvements to the school.

Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of significant improvement. They have written clear and detailed action plans, which are regularly reviewed and amended to ensure that the school's priorities for improvement remain at the forefront of all its work. Following the restructuring of the leadership team, there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability. All staff understand the school's priorities and their part in achieving its aims. Leaders recognise that the school's weaknesses have not been identified in the past. They have taken effective action to ensure that this has been rectified. They carry out regular monitoring activities, which means that their evaluation of the school's effectiveness is up to date. They have also ensured that their judgements are verified by external partners and the trust's school improvement team. Leaders are now able to provide accurate information about the school's work to governors. This has contributed to the effectiveness of governors in holding leaders to account.

The headteacher has identified five key concepts on which to base school improvement: precious learning time, improving outcomes, positive professionalism, shared pride and a service culture. These concepts form the basis of the school's vision. They underpin all aspects of the school's work and encompass the areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection. All staff recognise and understand these concepts. Everyone in the school knows what they should be doing to bring about the necessary improvements.

Considerable work has been undertaken to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The head of school has assumed leadership for this important aspect of the school's work. Initially he conducted a rigorous and in-depth review of the quality of practice across the school and used this to inform his plan to bring about improvements. Senior leaders have worked with subject leaders to create a new teaching and learning policy, which sets out clear expectations of teachers and lesson structures. Teachers understand the policy's concept of 'pitch, pace and activity'. This directs teachers to consider the level of challenge when they are planning their lessons and to provide opportunities for pupils to engage in focused activities.

In the past, teachers' assessment of pupils' work has been over-generous. In addition, their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve has been too low. Leaders have taken action to improve the accuracy of assessment, for example through training. Subject leaders have worked with staff across the trust to moderate the assessment of pupils' work, for example by checking the marking of Year 11 trial examination papers. They now have an accurate picture of pupils' progress and are able to take action to intervene where necessary. They have also re-written schemes of work to ensure that lessons provide greater challenge to pupils. The headteacher has been successful in raising expectations in all areas of the school and, in particular, in raising expectation of what pupils can do. The level of challenge in lessons throughout the school has increased.

As part of the work to raise expectations of what pupils, including those in the sixth

form, are able to achieve, leaders have introduced a new system of target setting. Targets are based on pupils' prior attainment and regularly reviewed. Teachers are held to account for pupils' progress towards achieving these targets.

Leaders have taken effective action to share best practice in the school and to learn from others in the trust. Leaders have identified areas of strength in different departments. Stronger practitioners work with staff in need of support, coaching and mentoring them to develop. Leaders have also established a working group of staff who research and share best practice. External advisers and staff from the trust have provided training. Leaders provide opportunities for staff to observe their peers and to visit other schools in the trust. Staff are extremely positive about these development opportunities and say that they have helped them to improve.

The effectiveness of subject leaders has improved since the last inspection. They understand their role in school improvement and are held to account by the head of school. Subject leaders have received training and support from senior leaders in the school and staff across the trust. For example, they have visited other schools to learn from effective leadership strategies. Not all subject leaders are equally effective, however. Senior leaders are aware of where further development is needed, and plans are in place to support and challenge weaknesses.

The headteacher took swift action to commission an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding, as recommended by the last inspection. However, leaders were slow to implement the recommendations of the review. In January 2018, the headteacher reallocated leadership of this aspect of the school's work to the deputy headteacher. She is supported by one of the newly appointed heads of house, whose whole-school leadership responsibility is as operational lead for disadvantaged pupils. They have written a detailed strategy which incorporates the recommendations of the external review. Leaders' monitoring indicates, however, that staff do not implement the agreed approaches consistently. Leaders are also aware of the need to consider the impact of the funding when evaluating the success of strategies to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This will be explored at the next monitoring visit.

The headteacher has spent considerable time and energy working with parents. For example, following the last inspection she held a series of meetings in which she addressed parents' concerns about the school's effectiveness and shared the plans for improvement. She has responded to parents' feedback, for example by reviewing and amending the system for parents' evenings to enable a greater proportion of parents to attend in order to support their child's learning. The headteacher is keen to develop relationships with parents further.

Governance arrangements have been strengthened by the appointment of the new LGB. Governors have a clear and realistic understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The effectiveness of their challenge and support has improved.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent between and within departments. The implementation of the new teaching, learning and assessment policy has contributed to improvements but considerable weaknesses remain. Teachers' expectations of what pupils are able to achieve have increased and teachers now plan more challenging activities. They do not, however, routinely plan activities which meet the needs of different groups of pupils. The most able are not always sufficiently challenged and the least able are not supported effectively. Furthermore, some activities are too challenging and pupils do not always understand what they should be doing or have the means to do so well. Teaching assistants are not deployed effectively. They do not contribute to pupils' progress as much as they should.

Leaders have introduced a new assessment and feedback policy but teachers do not apply it consistently. Pupils do not always understand what they need to do to improve their work.

There are pockets of stronger teaching where teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan activities which interest and enthuse pupils. Some teachers use questioning to probe pupils' understanding and support them to develop their reasoning. The most effective teachers check pupils' understanding and adapt their plans accordingly. Improving the consistency and quality of teaching in all areas of the school remains a priority.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The concept of 'precious learning time' has been embraced by all staff and the vast majority of pupils. The headteacher has effected a zero-tolerance approach to the interruption of lessons and the focus is now firmly on learning. Leaders have introduced a new behaviour policy that is simple and clear. It is consistently applied by all staff, and pupils respond well to expectations as a result. Behaviour has improved considerably since the last inspection. During the two days of the visit, inspectors noted very few examples of low-level disruption. Pupils said that this is typical in most lessons. The few instances of low-level disruption are the result of weaker teaching that does not meet the needs of pupils.

Staff have adopted the concept of 'positive professionalism' and model good behaviour, which is replicated by the vast majority of pupils. Pupils are polite and well mannered. A culture of respect is developing rapidly. One pupil commented that they were no longer shouted at and that they no longer feared coming to school. Pupils are developing in confidence and beginning to respond to the 'can-do' attitude that staff promote. The new behaviour policy states clear expectations of good behaviour alongside clear consequences for those who fail to meet expectations. Its focus, however, is on rewarding positive behaviour and celebrating pupils' success. Inspectors noted many examples where teachers praised pupils'

positive behaviour, including their participation and effort in lessons. This approach is greatly appreciated by pupils.

Leaders monitor pupils' behaviour closely, intervening where necessary and ensuring that pupils are provided with the necessary support. Pupils said that bullying is rare. They are confident that any incidents would be dealt with swiftly and effectively if they did occur. The number of incidents of poor behaviour has reduced and fewer pupils are removed from lessons than has been the case in the past. As a result of raised expectations of behaviour, the number of fixed-term exclusions has increased since the last inspection. Disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately represented in these figures. The overall number of exclusions, however, is slowly reducing with time.

Attendance and punctuality have improved since the last inspection. Leaders have restructured the school day as part of the 'precious learning time' principle. There is a greater sense of purpose around the school and pupils make their way quickly to their next lesson. Leaders' monitoring information indicates that the proportion of pupils who are late to school in the morning has declined considerably. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is lower than the national average. However, whole school attendance and that of disadvantaged pupils are below national averages.

Outcomes for pupils

A history of low expectations and weak teaching has limited pupils' progress in recent years. In 2017, pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 was below the national average in all subjects and considerably below in mathematics, languages and humanities.

Disadvantaged pupils have also made very poor progress over recent years. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils' outcomes were in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally for mathematics, languages and humanities. Their progress in English and science was also considerably slower than that of other pupils nationally. Current plans to improve outcomes for this group of pupils are now more specific than they have been in the past, but leaders do not yet evaluate the impact of these plans fully. Teachers do not consistently follow the agreed expectations of the 'classroom entitlement' for disadvantaged pupils.

Raised expectations of what pupils are able to achieve and improved teaching in all areas of the school mean that pupils are currently making faster progress than in the past. Leaders' information indicates that a greater proportion of pupils will achieve the standard and strong passes in English and mathematics than in previous years. Disadvantaged pupils are also expected to achieve higher grades than seen previously.

External support

The trust has recently grown in size, which has resulted in a greater capacity for school improvement support. Prior to the previous inspection there had been limited impact of the trust on school improvement. At the time of the last inspection, the trust had begun to take more effective action to support and challenge leaders in the school. This has continued, and since the inspection the trust has provided considerable support and challenge to leaders and staff in the school. For example, directors of subjects in the trust have worked with heads of subject in school to support internal evaluation of the department's effectiveness and to provide support to bring about improvements.

Members of the trust recognise that previous evaluations of the school's effectiveness were not rigorously verified, nor was accurate information provided to governors. This has since been rectified. The trust has undertaken robust quality assurance activities, and information provided to governors is both checked internally and corroborated by external partners.