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9 July 2018

Mr Anthony Williams  
Principal  
Felixstowe Academy  
High Street  
Felixstowe  
Suffolk  
IP11 9QR

Dear Mr Williams

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Felixstowe Academy**

Following my visit with Paul Wilson, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 26–27 June 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 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 November 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 recommend that the school continue to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2017.**

- Improve pupils' personal development and welfare by:
  - ensuring that there are robust systems in place to deal effectively with bullying
  - promoting a culture where all pupils feel safe
  - providing timely, regular and effective instruction on the impact of all forms of bullying so that pupils are confident in reporting concerns to adults
  - ensuring that all issues of bullying are dealt with promptly and consistently, in line with clear and robust policies.
- Improve pupils' achievement by:
  - increasing the progress that disadvantaged pupils make so that they perform at least as well as all other pupils nationally
  - developing effective strategies to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities so that they make progress that is at least similar to all pupils nationally with the same starting points
  - ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is consistently good and that adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - accelerating the pace of school improvement by embedding clear and systematic monitoring of the impact of leaders' work on the progress that pupils make
  - developing effective strategies to reduce rates of pupils' absence, persistent absence and fixed-term exclusions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
  - restoring positive relationships with parents so that they have confidence in the school's leadership.

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

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 June 2018 to 27 June 2018**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and other senior leaders, middle leaders, the chair and two other members of the local governing body, the national director of secondary schools from the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) and a system leader from the AET, who operates as a school improvement partner. Inspectors met with various groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and those who are disadvantaged. Most pupils were chosen by the inspection team.

Pupils from Years 7 to 12 were observed in lessons across a wide range of subjects. Pupils in Year 11 and students in Year 13 were not in school. Inspectors looked at pupils' books in lessons, and also looked more closely at a selection of books of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged.

Inspectors also reviewed the school's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils and checked the single central record of recruitment checks of staff.

### **Context**

By the end of this academic year, 24 teachers will have left the school. The school is fully and permanently staffed for the start of the new academic year in September 2018. Since November 2017, the senior leadership of the school has been restructured. Whereas there were initially 14 senior leaders, this has been reduced to six, including the principal. Middle leadership has also been restructured, with the introduction of key phase leaders.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Your strategic decision to restructure the senior leadership team has led to greater clarity of roles and responsibilities. These roles now play to strengths, and staff are much clearer about whom they should approach when guidance is required. You have wisely appointed a knowledgeable member of staff to the post of vice-principal, who leads on achievement data and the tracking of pupils' progress. Most staff have an improved understanding of how to interpret this data, which is regularly made reference to during pupil progress discussions.

Because you have significantly reduced the number of senior leaders, you require more of your team of middle leaders. Although they are willing and committed, their experience of middle leadership varies quite widely. They share your vision and drive for school improvement, and their involvement in determining the vision for the school, along with other stakeholders, gives them ownership of this vision. They told me, 'We are all in this together', which is an encouraging sign. However, they require continued support and guidance to maintain the improving standards you have already achieved and then to build on these. This is particularly important as

their experience of middle leadership varies considerably and they will be overseeing a significant number of new staff from September 2018.

You are monitoring the school's work more systematically. Senior leaders' fortnightly meetings with subject leaders have a standardised and agreed agenda, and have ensured greater accountability. Pupils' progress across the school is a regular topic for discussion. These discussions on progress are informed by middle and senior leaders' more comprehensive scrutiny of achievement data, observations of teaching, learning and assessment and by more brief visits to lessons. Most importantly, the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' progress is checked and challenged by senior leaders. Practice assessments are marked by experienced subject examiners. One subject lead told us that she asks her teachers to submit sample assessments covering the complete range of marks, and re-marks these as if they were being marked for the first time. These checking systems are becoming more typical practice in the school.

The responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, reflect parents' and carers' negative perceptions of the school. The 245 parents who have responded since the start of this academic year express their concerns about the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour, how well the school deals with bullying and how well the school is led and managed. Your own survey, which replicates the Ofsted model, and which is handed out at parent evenings, suggests that the 165 parents who completed this survey have more positive views about the school. This is an indication of the progress they feel you are making in relation to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection in November 2017. You have also attempted to restore positive relationships with parents through making yourself available to discuss their concerns at your fortnightly parents' surgeries. These are well attended. You acknowledge the need to continue to engage with parents so that they continue to have a more realistic view of the school and the progress being made.

Your statement of action and school action plan appropriately address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The action plan makes clear who is leading each area for improvement, what you hope to achieve and by when, and how you will measure the success of your actions.

The AET has offered support by pairing your school with one of their similar coastal schools in East Yorkshire. This partner school faced similar challenges to yours, and the principal has proven success of raising standards, moving the school from one which had serious weaknesses to a school now judged as good. He meets with you one day per week and also with other senior leaders who are being coached effectively to move the school forward. These leaders are being held to account for their performance due to a 'no excuses' culture which now permeates the school.

The restructuring of the governing body has led to governance becoming more focused on school improvement. A professional AET chair of the governing body was appointed to add rigour to governance. Governors have a better understanding of the school's current position through their termly scrutiny days. On these days,

they typically conduct an internal review of the school's effectiveness, determining in advance their own lines of enquiry and carrying out a wide range of appropriate activities to gather their evidence. They are determined to check the accuracy of what they are told during these activities in order to gain a true and realistic picture of the school's effectiveness.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Weak teaching over time and teachers' low expectations of pupils have contributed towards a legacy of underachievement. You have put support mechanisms in place to deal with poor teaching by working with teachers to improve their performance. When they have failed to respond to this support, you have not shied away from having difficult conversations about their performance. However, as a consequence of the mobility in staffing that this necessary action caused, pupils told inspectors they did not feel that they were making as much progress as they could either in lessons which were being taught by numerous agency staff, particularly in science, or where the class is split between more than one teacher. In the latter example, pupils felt that some teachers were not communicating with each other effectively about topics covered when the class is shared. The fact that the school is fully staffed for September 2018 aims to secure greater stability and consistency.

Inspectors' visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work, and their scrutiny of your own lesson observation documentation, indicate that the quality of teaching is improving. Where teaching secures sound progress, teachers typically make effective use of questioning to test for understanding and deepen pupils' knowledge. Pupils are encouraged to use subject-specific terms in their writing and it is clear that teachers are raising their expectations as to what pupils are able to achieve. However, the quality of teaching remains too variable. Where learning is less effective, progress is slower because some teachers expect all pupils to do the same work when it is inappropriate to do so. Additionally, although some teachers are clearly attempting to develop their use of questioning, they also tend to ask pupils a question, then answer it themselves without giving pupils sufficient thinking time. Ongoing support and challenge are also necessary to ensure that teaching more consistently meets the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. Inspectors also noted that disadvantaged pupils are less likely to respond to their teachers' written comments when work is returned, even though all pupils are expected to do this as part of the school's implementation of its assessment policy.

Teachers who are new to the profession receive comprehensive support and guidance. The quality of their teaching is monitored closely and they have access to a wide range of training, both in-house and external. Those newly qualified and trainee teachers who met with inspectors were highly complimentary about the support they receive and struggled to say how it could be improved.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Inspectors found evidence to suggest that the school is dealing more effectively with incidents of bullying. When meeting with inspectors, pupils demonstrated a clearer understanding of what constitutes bullying and they could distinguish the difference between a squabble with a classmate and more serious persistent physical or verbal attacks. Reported incidents of bullying have declined over the year, and pupils feel that bullying, when reported, is dealt with more effectively and that the school is a safer place. They welcome the fact that areas of the school which they previously judged to be no-go areas have been tidied up. Physical barriers have been removed, which allows staff to have a clear view of these spaces when they are on duty during breaktimes and lunchtimes. Senior leaders have wisely introduced split breaks and lunchtimes to make the popular atrium area of the school less crowded at peak times, although some of the younger pupils still feel that the corridors are too congested at times.

The school's SPACE (social, personal, aspirational, careers and ethics) programme covers important aspects of keeping safe, including e-safety. Inspectors also observed a Year 9 assembly on the theme of resilience, in which pupils were presented with well-known personalities who have overcome barriers to being successful. The message of the assembly was clear: life is what you make of it and it is down to the individual to make the very best of their opportunities.

There have been notable improvements in pupils' behaviour, particularly in lessons where learning is effective and relationships between teachers and pupils are positive. Inspectors observed little low-level disruptive behaviour when visiting lessons across the school. The introduction of conduct cards has attracted a mixed response from pupils. While some pupils do not like the fact that these must be on their person at all times, they appreciate their purpose and confirm that behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved because of these. The proportion of fixed-term exclusions has decreased by 1% this year. As a result of this reduction, the number of pupils being internally excluded has increased slightly, due to the fact that teachers are now using this facility correctly, and because of their higher expectations of behaviour. When inspectors visited this facility, they found that pupils were being set work that was wholly appropriate for their needs.

Leaders have had less of an impact in improving pupils' overall attendance since the previous inspection. Attendance is still too low, and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or who are disadvantaged are over-represented in the overall figures. Although the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has decreased, improving pupils' attendance remains a key priority for the school's leaders.

The school's record of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff is compliant with current requirements. Child protection records are well maintained, and staff have a strong awareness of safeguarding procedures.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

Outcomes were low at the end of key stage 4 in 2017. Pupils underachieved, with the exception of those SEN pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). This underachievement has been partly due to a legacy of the inconsistent and variable quality of teaching over time, combined with low expectations of pupils' capabilities.

Things have now started to change, with higher expectations of teachers themselves but also of what your pupils are capable of achieving. Your own systems for tracking, which involve sharper monitoring and the involvement of other schools within the AET, indicate that an upward shift in the rate of pupils' progress is taking place across all year groups. This improvement in pupils' progress is also reflected through pupils' work in their books, observations of teaching and learning, and results from tests and assessments, which are more thoroughly checked for their accuracy than was previously the case. Inspectors' scrutiny of your achievement data confirms that pupils currently in Year 11 are making better progress in English than in mathematics.

This welcome shift in pupils' attainment and progress does, however, reveal the need to make this progress more rapid for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and for those who are disadvantaged. Not all teachers' planning takes account of the needs of these pupils. This was evident from inspectors' scrutiny of these two groups of pupils' books, and from discussions which took place with them during the inspection. These pupils were able to show inspectors samples of their work where they felt they were making some gains in their learning, but they are not yet making enough progress.

## **External support**

Two external reviews have taken place since the previous inspection. The review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding took place in March 2018. This useful document makes suitable recommendations which have been incorporated in your pupil premium action plan. It correctly identifies the need to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and to work more closely with parents of disadvantaged pupils to engage them more in their children's education when at home.

You also commissioned a review of the SEN provision in March 2018, which was not a recommendation from the previous inspection but which you rightly recognised as a necessary strategic action to take. This review identified that teachers do not always plan effectively for these pupils, and whereas good-quality resources were targeted at pupils who have an EHCP, not enough support was offered to other SEN pupils. The review also rightly identified that teachers relied too much on the presence of learning support assistants, which allowed the class teacher to direct their teaching towards other groups in the class. Your special educational needs coordinator has taken this on board and has since provided some useful training to teachers. As a result, they now consider the needs of these pupils when planning for learning, even if there is insufficient impact at this stage.