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Mr Andy Vinton
Interim Principal
Gloucester Academy
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Dear Mr Vinton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Gloucester Academy

Following my visit with Judith Mee, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18 to 19 December 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 April 2018.

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 improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to 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 Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2018.

- Leaders and managers drive rapid improvements in the standard of education in the school by ensuring that:
 - they quicken the pace of change
 - the impact of their plans, policies and practice is monitored effectively to ensure that outcomes for pupils improve
 - expectations are raised, so that pupils' progress is at least in line with national expectations
 - middle leaders have the skills to monitor the work of teachers so that teaching improves consistently
 - pupils develop a good understanding of British values and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum so that they are prepared well for life in modern Britain
 - pupils' attitudes to learning improve and episodes of misconduct are swiftly reduced
 - attendance overall, and particularly of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), improves so that it is at least in line with the national average.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide effective opportunities for pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy within English and mathematics and across the wider curriculum
 - the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are provided with learning that is sufficiently challenging and deepens their thinking
 - pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils are provided with support that stretches their learning further so that they make good progress from their starting points.

An external review of the impact of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 18 December 2018 to 19 December 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors observed pupils' learning in a range of subjects. Inspectors met the interim principal, the chief executive officer and the director of secondary education from The White Horse Federation multi-academy trust. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the board of trustees. Inspectors met with senior leaders, middle leaders and spoke with pupils formally and informally. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding.

Context

Gloucester Academy is sponsored by The White Horse Federation.

The White Horse Federation is a multi-academy trust that comprises 32 schools. Five of these are secondary schools, 25 are primary schools and two are special schools.

The previous principal left the school in April 2018, soon after it was placed in special measures. The interim principal was appointed immediately after he left. The chair of the local governing body and one other governor resigned in July 2018. The trust appointed a governance adviser to work with all of its schools from September 2018 onwards. This adviser has helped to recruit enough new governors to constitute a viable local governing body.

At the end of the summer term, 14 teachers left the school. New teachers have been successfully recruited to replace them. The school has a full complement of staff. A new vice-principal and a new assistant principal were appointed and began work in September 2018.

The school decided not to admit any students into Year 12 in September 2018. Those students already studying on post-16 courses will complete Year 13 this year and take examinations in summer 2019. After that, the sixth form will close.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The trust board acted swiftly to appoint an interim principal when the previous principal left the school and so secure the senior leadership of the school. The interim principal has brought the school through a period of substantial change in staffing. He has established a leadership team with clear roles and responsibilities. Staff have confidence in the interim principal and the leadership team because together they are setting a clear direction for the school. They have a credible plan for improving the school.

Starting in September, senior leaders introduced new timings for the school day. They simplified the day by bringing in a common start time, finish time and a single lunchtime for all pupils. These changes have been welcomed by pupils. They told inspectors that having the same timings each day helps with their own personal organisation.

Middle leaders are being held to account for the performance of teachers in their subject areas more consistently than in the past. Middle leaders are beginning to establish higher expectations of staff in their departments, but this has not yet had a significant impact on the quality of teaching. Middle leaders will be provided with training to enhance their leadership skills in the near future.

Leaders have recently reviewed the personal, social, cultural and health education programme. It has been overhauled and restructured. A tutorial period now takes place at the start of each day. Much better organisation of this time means pupils are involved in purposeful activity during tutorial times. This year, leaders have introduced whole day events where, once per term, the normal timetable is suspended and pupils receive intensive teaching on a particular topic. Together, these changes are leading pupils to a greater understanding of fundamental British values.

Senior leaders' work to improve the communication between teachers has caused better sharing of information about pupils' needs. Teachers keep important information about pupils close at hand in a common format. This is leading to a growing understanding of the particular needs of different groups of pupils, including those pupils who are disadvantaged.

An external review of the impact of funding to support disadvantaged pupils was carried out in September 2018. Senior leaders have acted on the findings of this review and revised their strategy for the use of this additional funding. However, it is too early to see whether the new approach makes a significant impact on the progress of this group of pupils.

Parents are kept well informed about the actions that senior leaders are taking to improve the school, through a regular newsletter from the interim principal. He has set up a parents' focus group so that parents' views are taken into account when decisions about the school are made. He is building links with parents from ethnic minority communities, particularly parents of Eastern European descent. These actions are improving parents' understanding of the school's systems and expectations.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding have improved and are now effective. Senior leaders responded quickly and effectively to the findings of the previous inspection report. They have systematically improved each of the areas that were found to be ineffective.

The board of trustees of The White Horse Federation has responsibility for the governance of this school. The local governing body reduced in size following the previous inspection. Only three governors remained in July 2018. The trust board has worked constructively with the local governing body since that point to increase its size and its capacity to carry out its role. The trust has successfully recruited new governors to join the local governing body. As a result, the local governing body is now able to provide more effective challenge and support to senior leaders over the performance of the school. Supported by the trust, a programme of training is planned for governors.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers now understand senior leaders' expectations of their work. Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school against a set of agreed criteria. This is leading to improvement in some aspects of teaching. For example, pupils have a better understanding of the purpose of lessons because teachers are making their intentions clearer to them. Nevertheless, teaching is still highly inconsistent across the school.

Teaching is not well planned. Teachers have access to more accurate assessment information about the progress and attainment of pupils. However, they are not yet using this effectively to plan learning activities that stimulate and challenge pupils of different abilities.

Teachers assess pupils' knowledge and understanding regularly. They have recently introduced a new system for describing pupils' attainment and their progress towards agreed targets. This system has the potential to allow teachers to track pupils' progress through the year in each year group. It is at an early stage of development and so many pupils do not yet fully understand it.

Pupils' weaknesses in literacy skills are deeply ingrained because of their considerable underachievement in the past. Senior leaders' strategy for improving pupils' literacy skills has become more effective this year. In particular, key stage 3 pupils are benefiting from a more coordinated approach to developing their reading and writing. Even so, this work is still at an early stage.

Teachers' morale is improving. Although senior leaders are expecting more of them, they recognise that the changes taking place in the school are beginning to lead to improvements in pupils' behaviour and learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' poor behaviour in the past has made a major contribution to the weak progress pupils make. Their poor attitudes to learning, over a long period of time, have held back their progress and caused their low achievement. Since his

appointment, the interim principal has been determined to improve pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school. By introducing a new behaviour system across the school, he has raised the expectations of pupils' behaviour.

Pupils recognise the improvement in behaviour the new system has caused in most classrooms since September. However, senior leaders' raised expectations of pupils' conduct have led to an increase in the rate of exclusions in this period.

Senior leaders' efforts to improve behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime have had less success. Pupils are well supervised at these times. A large number of staff are present in the canteen at lunchtime, for instance. However, too often, pupils are boisterous and staff need to intervene to maintain an orderly environment.

Senior leaders' action to change the structure of the pastoral care arrangements in the school has been successful. Pastoral leaders are now each responsible for a single year group. This has led to greater clarity in pupils' minds about who to go to if they have a concern about their welfare. Pupils now meet together for assemblies in their year groups. This is allowing pastoral leaders to provide pupils with more praise and encouragement. For example, they give pupils rewards for good attendance and for good behaviour. The interim principal makes a point of leading whole-school assemblies each week. Together, these changes are contributing to improvements in pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development.

Senior leaders have introduced a new system for logging and tracking pupils' attendance. This is providing senior leaders and tutors with timely information about the attendance of groups of pupils. Tutors have higher expectations for pupils' attendance. They are treating the issue with greater urgency this year. The rate of pupils' attendance remains well below the national average overall. Nevertheless, there are some signs of improvement. For example, Year 7 pupils' rate of attendance has improved considerably this year. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has fallen this year. Improving pupils' attendance, particularly disadvantaged pupils' attendance, must remain a priority for senior leaders.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress measured across eight GCSEs was well below the national average in 2018 and the school's information shows that current pupils' progress is also weak.

Pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics improved in 2018 but remains well below average. Pupils have underachieved over a long period of time. Consequently, they have considerable gaps in their understanding of mathematics. Pupils did not make good progress in GCSE English last year. Few pupils attained the grades they could reasonably be expected to. Pupils currently in Year 11 are making better progress. Many pupils are able to discuss their English work with some confidence.

The most able pupils have not attained the highest grades in their examinations in recent years because they have not been challenged sufficiently by their teachers. Senior leaders have identified this group of pupils as a priority for improvement. However, their efforts to raise teachers' expectations of these pupils have not yet led to significant improvement in the progress of this group.

Teaching in geography, business studies, catering and in the creative arts is effective in engaging and motivating pupils. For example, many pupils are keen artists and so they produce artwork of a good standard. By contrast, much teaching in science does not motivate pupils well and so they make considerably less progress in this subject.

Last year, sixth-form students taking academic courses and those taking applied general courses made less progress from their starting points than students nationally. Students' attendance was poor last year. As a result of concerted action by leaders, students' attendance has improved considerably this year. Even so, many students are still not making the progress they are capable of in academic or applied general programmes.

The newly appointed leader with responsibility for pupils with (SEND) has made many improvements to their provision in a short space of time. She has improved the accuracy of assessment of pupils' needs, restructured the deployment of teaching assistants and provided training for staff. The school's assessment information shows that pupils with SEND are making better progress this year compared to last year. Although there are still inconsistencies, teachers are now better able to meet the needs of these pupils and so more of them are learning well.

External support

The school's senior leaders are outward looking and committed to working closely with the local education community. They have successfully formed partnerships with several local schools.

Middle leaders in mathematics and science at The Crypt School have begun working with their counterparts at this school to help improve the quality of teaching and learning in these subjects. This work has just begun and so it is at an early stage. From January 2019, support from The Crypt School will increase. A senior leader will begin working at this school one day per week to support the leadership of teaching and learning.

A senior leader from Sir Thomas Rich's School will work with middle leaders across the school to develop their leadership skills. The scope of this work has been agreed. It will begin in earnest in January 2019.

The leader of the provision for pupils with SEND has already brought about improvement in the provision for this group of pupils since September. She has recently formed a link with Milestone School to share ideas about the best ways to support these pupils. However, this link is not yet fully established.

The Peak Academy has expertise in supporting pupils who have social and emotional difficulties. Senior staff from The Peak Academy are advising senior leaders about how best to develop their new behaviour policy so that it is increasingly effective. This advice has already led to modifications to the school's procedures for dealing with poor behaviour.

The interim principal, supported by the director of secondary education and the chief executive officer of the trust, has brokered a wide range of support from local schools. Much of this support has only just begun, or is just about to begin, and so its impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress is limited. However, by his actions, the interim principal has significantly increased the capacity of the leadership of the school to make the necessary improvements.