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Mrs Sarah Gregory
Principal
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Dear Mrs Gregory

Special measures monitoring inspection of Copley Academy

Following my visit with Philip Wood, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 April 2019, 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 October 2018.

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 measure

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose

The school's improvement plan is not 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 interim executive board and the chief executive officer of the Great Academy Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching across the school so that pupils' outcomes, including those for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, rapidly improve, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' academic and social development
 - the quality of teachers' questioning and explanation improves so that pupils' misconceptions and difficulties in gaining new learning can be effectively tackled
 - recent improvements to teachers' training are embedded and built upon to ensure that they have greater impact on improving the quality of teaching
 - teachers use accurate assessment to match learning closely to pupils' needs
 - teachers have a better understanding of pupils' starting points, including the information provided at the end of primary school, and use this effectively to shape their teaching
 - teachers plan learning activities that interest and inspire pupils to learn.
- Ensure that the curriculum provides suitable levels of challenge for pupils of all levels of ability across the school.
- Rapidly improve the attendance of all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Ensure that leaders at all levels have much greater impact on pupils' achievement by:
 - further developing the role and skills of middle leaders
 - ensuring that assessment information provides accurate and useful information for leaders and teachers about how well pupils are achieving
 - making sure that trustees and governors oversee the work of the school more effectively and hold leaders more stringently to account for the impact of their work, including the effective use of additional funding
 - continuing to work with a wider range of good and outstanding schools to learn from the good practice in those schools
 - sharpening the school's and the trust's improvement planning, so that plans include measurable targets and milestones against which progress can be evaluated.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to see how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to see how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 April 2019

Evidence

During the inspection, the inspectors observed learning, scrutinised pupils' work and reviewed documentation. Inspectors met with the principal and other school leaders. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer and three consultants from the Great Academies Education Trust (GAET). These consultants are currently providing support to the school. The lead inspector also spoke on the telephone with the chair of the trust's executive board.

The lead inspector met with two representatives from the interim executive board (IEB), including the chair. Inspectors spoke formally with two groups of pupils and two groups of staff, including a group of middle leaders and a group of teachers with a range of teaching experience. Inspectors also spoke informally with pupils and staff around the school. Inspectors observed pupils before and after school, and during social times.

Inspectors discussed matters relating to pupils' attendance and safeguarding with school leaders. An inspector reviewed the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils.

Context

The school is part of the GAET multi-academy trust. GAET established an IEB in December 2018, to replace the local governing body that was in place at the time of the inspection. There have also been several changes to staffing since the inspection. This includes new appointments to both senior and middle leadership. For example, an assistant principal has been appointed to lead the area of pupil premium funding.

The school has received a range of support from within GAET, including support in mathematics, English and science. The GAET consultant who has been working in the English department is also working to improve the quality of teaching across the school. A GAET consultant has temporarily replaced the head of mathematics. A new head of mathematics is due to take up post at the start of the summer term.

GAET has provided support for some senior leaders. Senior leaders responsible for the pupil premium funding and pupils' attendance have been working alongside GAET consultants. A number of recent appointments mean that the school will be fully staffed from the start of the summer term 2019.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The inspection in October 2018 came during a turbulent period for the school. Although leaders and GAET representatives have acted to raise standards, they have been ineffective in securing sufficient improvements in the time given.

The principal and the senior leadership team are more determined than ever to improve Copley Academy. However, weaknesses remain at every level of leadership. Many leaders are new to their roles. They lack the experience and knowledge required to lead their areas effectively. Hence, the capacity to secure swift improvement is limited. Moreover, their efforts have been hampered by high levels of staff absence in several subjects. As a result, the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils are not improving at the pace required. Furthermore, there are some aspects of the school that have deteriorated, for instance the standard of pupils' behaviour.

Leaders and trust representatives have been slow to commission the external reviews of governance and pupil premium funding. Both external reviews were recommended at the inspection in October 2018. Despite this, neither of the external reviews has taken place. They will be carried out next term. This is not timely enough. The lack of urgency in arranging these external reviews has slowed the pace of improvement in both areas.

The trust acted swiftly to replace the local governing body with an IEB. Members of the IEB bring to their roles an appropriate range of relevant skills and knowledge. They provide support and challenge to senior leaders. For example, they have challenged leaders about the delay of the external review of pupil premium funding. However, members of the IEB are unclear about the roles and responsibilities which have been delegated to them by trustees. GAET has not provided some members of the IEB with enough information about their delegated roles and responsibilities to carry them out effectively. This is preventing the IEB from holding leaders to account diligently enough.

Since January 2019, a newly appointed senior leader has been working alongside a GAET consultant to improve leaders' use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders now have accurate information about the individual barriers to learning that face this group of pupils. As a result, leaders can check whether additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is making a difference. For example, leaders are checking which strategies are the most effective in improving the attendance of this group of pupils. The delay in starting this work means that some disadvantaged pupils have not received their entitlement soon enough.

Since the inspection, leaders' plans to improve the school have been ineffective in securing enough improvement. There are now measurable targets and milestones to hold leaders to account. However, these targets and milestones are unrealistic.

Improvement plans do not provide leaders with meaningful targets to work towards. The targets set are also not achievable in the time given. The principal has established clear roles and responsibilities for each senior leader. However, there is a lack of clarity in leaders' improvement plans about who is accountable for and who monitors each area.

Since the inspection, leaders have acted to strengthen middle leadership. Some new middle leaders have been appointed. Through the trust, some middle leaders have benefited from appropriate training. Recently appointed middle leaders in English, science and history are starting to have a positive effect on the quality of teaching in these subjects. Consultants from GAET are providing support in mathematics, English and science. However, weaknesses in middle leadership remain in some subjects. Some middle leaders explained how ongoing staffing changes are hampering their efforts to improve outcomes for pupils.

Pupils and staff are frustrated by the slow pace at which the school is improving. Staff morale is particularly low. This is reflected in high rates of staff absence and staffing turbulence. Pupils explained to inspectors how they have had several different teachers in some subjects, over a short period. Some pupils, particularly those in key stage 4, are worried about the impact that this is having on the quality of their education. They explained how ongoing staffing changes mean that there is a lack of continuity in their learning. Moreover, the support that temporary staff receive from leaders is inconsistent in its quality.

Leaders have acted to improve the level of challenge offered by the curriculum. Work in the books of some pupils shows that the curriculum, in pockets, is providing a higher level of challenge. For example, some teachers plan learning that challenges key stage 3 pupils in history and science. However, some pupils do not have access to a curriculum that is appropriately challenging or sequenced well. This is because of weaknesses in the quality of teaching.

Leaders have also made changes to the key stage 4 curriculum. Consequently, a higher proportion of pupils are now studying a modern foreign language at key stage 4. Leaders have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils. However, weaknesses in the quality of teaching mean that too many key stage 4 pupils will underachieve significantly.

Leaders have implemented effective systems to check on pupils' progress. Leaders have also taken steps to ensure that teachers' assessment information is accurate. This is helping to identify the gaps in some pupils' learning. For example, in mathematics, some teachers are using assessment information to plan learning that helps pupils to overcome misconceptions. As a result, some pupils in key stage 4 are making greater gains in their mathematical learning. That said, some teachers do not use assessment information consistently well to plan and sequence learning. As a result, there are occasions during learning where pupils' time is not used effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Some teachers have high expectations of pupils. Some pupils respond positively: they rise to the challenge and take a keen interest in their learning. However, teachers' expectations are not consistently high across the school. Consequently, pupils' attitudes to learning vary considerably within subjects and year groups. There are times when some pupils give up too easily and they submit work that is incomplete or of a poor quality. Some pupils refuse to follow teachers' instructions and complete activities set by their teachers.

Some teachers use their strong subject knowledge to design probing questions and clear explanations. Where this is done effectively, pupils overcome concepts that they find difficult and address gaps in their knowledge. For example, some teachers plan learning to address the gaps in pupils' understanding in mathematics. Nonetheless, this is not done consistently well. There are times when teachers do not address pupils' misconceptions, and the gaps in pupils' learning widen.

Some teachers use accurate assessment to match learning to pupils' needs. This means that pupils can build on and develop their knowledge. However, there are teachers who do not use information about what pupils can do already. As a result, some teachers do not plan learning that allows pupils to apply their knowledge to more difficult tasks or develop their understanding further. On too many occasions, valuable learning time is lost.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have improved the systems that they use to check on pupils' attendance. The importance of good attendance also has a higher profile across the school. As a result, leaders have secured some improvements in pupils' rates of attendance. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

A higher proportion of pupils attend school more regularly than at the time of the previous inspection. This is especially the case for younger pupils. Nonetheless, pupils' rates of attendance in key stage 4 remain well below the national average. For example, over a quarter of Year 11 pupils are regularly absent from school.

Many pupils and staff report that pupils' behaviour is deteriorating. Both pupils and staff explained to inspectors that some teachers do not apply leaders' systems consistently. There are some teachers who do not have enough confidence that middle and senior leaders will deal with pupils' behaviour effectively.

The proportion of pupils excluded from school for a fixed period has increased considerably. Leaders' behaviour logs show that, more recently, pupils' behaviour is starting to improve. However, a significant minority of pupils continue to misbehave

and ignore instructions from some teachers.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders' assessment information shows that pupils in key stage 4 continue to underachieve considerably. This is because the quality of teaching is not improving quickly enough.

Differences between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are not diminishing. This is because of ongoing weaknesses in the quality of teaching. This is also due to leaders' ineffective use of additional funding to support this group of pupils.

There are occasions where improvements in the quality of teaching are having a positive impact on the progress that pupils make. For example, in mathematics and history some teachers are helping pupils to make greater gains in their learning. However, too often, the quality of teaching is not good enough to make up for the legacy of weak teaching over time.

External support

More recently, leaders are benefiting from a wider range of external support. For instance, in history and English middle leaders and teachers have had the opportunity to work with colleagues from schools beyond the trust.

GAET has provided a range of support at both senior and middle leadership level. However, this support has not had a significantly positive impact on improving the leadership of the school.