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Mr Kenwyn Paddy
Acting Principal
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Dear Mr Paddy

Special measures monitoring inspection of Copley Academy

Following my visit with Elizabeth Haddock, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 1 and 2 October 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2018. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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 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 interim chair of the trust's executive board and the chief executive officer (CEO) 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 of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 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 with SEND.
- 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 in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 to 2 October 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed learning and checked on pupils' work. Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including leaders' improvement plan. Inspectors met with the acting principal, acting deputy principal and other school leaders. Inspectors also met with three consultants from the Great Academies Education Trust (GAET). The lead inspector met with the CEO and the interim chair of the trust's executive board.

Inspectors spoke with two groups of pupils and three groups of staff. These groups of staff included middle leaders, teachers and other staff. Inspectors spoke with pupils around the school and observed pupils at social times.

Inspectors discussed matters relating to safeguarding with school leaders. An inspector reviewed leaders' checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils.

Context

The school is part of the GAET multi-academy trust. Since the last monitoring inspection, which took place in April 2019, the chair of the board of directors has resigned and been replaced by an interim chair. A new CEO of the trust was appointed on 1 September 2019.

Following a review of governance, all the members of the school's interim executive board (IEB), which was in place at the last monitoring inspection, have resigned. Since July 2019, the trust's outcomes board has held responsibility for the school's governance.

In June 2019, the principal and deputy principal left the school. An acting principal and acting deputy principal were appointed. A new head of the mathematics department took up their post in April 2019.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

There are early signs that leaders are having a positive effect on the quality of education at the school. Some leaders have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve. These leaders ensure that subject curriculums are ambitious for pupils. For example, the key stage 4 mathematics and English curriculums are demanding. In contrast, the curriculums in some other subjects are not demanding enough. For example, the curriculums for younger pupils in geography and life studies lack challenge.

In some subjects, such as history and languages, curriculum plans are well designed. This is because leaders consider carefully the best order in which to teach topics. Teachers know what to teach and when. They have a clear understanding of what pupils can already do. This means that pupils can build on their prior learning. However, some leaders have not designed their curriculums well. They have not

given enough thought to the knowledge that pupils need for some topics. This means that pupils have not covered some of the most important content for future learning.

There are curriculum plans in place across all subjects. However, some teachers do not follow the curriculum. This means that some pupils are unable to build upon the content they have learned already. They cannot apply their knowledge to more complex ideas. Some pupils do not experience the curriculum that leaders want for them.

There are times when teachers use assessment well. Some teachers use their strong subject knowledge to address pupils' errors and misconceptions. Some teachers provide clear explanations and useful feedback for pupils. That said, there are too many occasions where teachers do not use assessment to inform and adapt their teaching. Many pupils have gaps in their knowledge. There are still many subjects in which Year 11 pupils do not attain well in their external examinations.

Leaders and teachers have not adapted the curriculum well enough for pupils with SEND. There have been some improvements in this area. For example, teachers now have information about the needs of this group of pupils. That said, subject leaders and teachers say that this information is not detailed enough.

At the previous monitoring inspection, pupils' behaviour was getting worse. Leaders and teachers report that pupils' behaviour and attitudes continued to deteriorate during the summer term. Staff say that many pupils showed a lack of respect for adults and often ignored requests from their teachers. Staff did not feel that leaders supported them well to manage pupils' behaviour.

The acting principal and acting deputy principal have acted quickly to improve pupils' behaviour. Staff say that senior leaders now support them well to manage behaviour. There are higher expectations for pupils' conduct. Staff and pupils understand these expectations. More teachers and staff apply the renewed behaviour systems consistently. Pupils' behaviour across the school has improved considerably since the previous monitoring visit. School records show that there are fewer incidents of poor behaviour. Pupils said that they experience less disruption to their learning than has been the case in the past.

Following the last monitoring inspection, pupils' attendance also deteriorated. Leaders have acted to stem this decline. There are signs that pupils' attendance is improving. More pupils attend school regularly. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The trust has acted to strengthen the leadership of the school. It is still early days for this new senior leadership team. Yet the amount of improvement in the time given since the last monitoring visit is impressive.

There was an external review of governance following the previous monitoring visit. This revealed endemic weaknesses in the level of challenge provided by the IEB. The trust's standards board has replaced the IEB. Members of the trust's standards board have a clear understanding of their roles. They hold senior leaders to account effectively. The newly appointed CEO of GAET checks on all aspects of the school's performance closely.

Senior leaders have acted to ensure that plans to improve the school are fit for purpose. Their plans are accurate and realistic. They address those areas that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. They also address those aspects of the school that had got worse, such as pupils' behaviour. Leaders have prioritised their actions well. Their plans include measurable targets. This means the improvements that leaders make can be checked on regularly.

At the last monitoring inspection, relationships between staff and senior leaders had broken down and there were high rates of staff absence. The acting principal and acting deputy principal have acted swiftly to repair these relationships. Senior leaders provide staff with a strong and clear vision that they welcome. Staff told inspectors that they look forward to coming to work again. They are confident that senior leaders consider their workload and the challenges that they face. Senior leaders have provided staff and pupils with some much-needed stability.

Leaders and GAET trustees have ensured that there are more opportunities to keep parents and carers up to date with developments. There are early signs that parents' views about the school are starting to change for the better.

Senior leaders and trustees have also ensured that staff can benefit from relevant training. The trust has increased the level of support they provide to improve teaching across the school. That said, leaders are aware that there is more work to do in this area, for instance to allow teachers to benefit more from subject-specific training.

Subject leaders are also receiving more support. For example, subject leaders appreciate the help that they receive from senior leaders with their departmental improvement plans. Some subject leaders receive additional support through the trust. For example, support from the trust is having a positive effect in mathematics, science and languages.

Following improvements in staff attendance and pupils' behaviour, subject leaders say they can focus on planning and delivering the intended curriculum. They appreciate the higher level of challenge they receive from senior leaders.

Leaders have appropriate checks in place to make sure that staff are safe to work with pupils. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. They said that behaviour is improving. They also report that there are fewer incidents of bullying than there have been in the past.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have secured marked improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Staff have confidence in leaders' behaviour systems.
- Leaders are securing improvements to pupils' attendance. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have put systems in place to support pupils with SEND. That said, these systems are in their infancy. Leaders and teachers do not adapt the curriculum well to meet the needs of this group of pupils.
- Curriculum plans provide an overview of the topics that teachers should deliver and in what order. However, these plans vary in their quality. Some curriculum plans do not provide teachers with enough information about the content they should cover. Others do not consider carefully enough the most important knowledge that pupils will need for future learning.

External support

Following the previous monitoring inspection, the trust has secured further external support for the school. The Rodillian Trust is providing this support. This support has had a strong impact on strengthening the senior leadership team and on improving staff morale and pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Staffing at the school is now stable and fewer temporary teachers are being used.

The Rodillian Trust also provides support for the special educational needs coordinator. This support is only in its infancy and has not had enough impact on the quality of education for this group of pupils.

The local authority is providing support for leaders to help to reduce pupils' absence. This is having a positive effect. More pupils attend school regularly.

A consultant from AET academies has been providing support for mathematics to plan and develop the curriculum. This support has only started recently. It has not had enough impact on improving the quality of subject leaders' curriculum planning.