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Mr Ian Golding
Interim Executive Headteacher
Plymouth School of Creative Arts
22 Millbay Road
Plymouth
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Dear Mr Golding

Special measures monitoring inspection of Plymouth School of Creative Arts

Following my visit with Paula Marsh, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 19 to 20 November 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 January 2019.

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 measures.

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 board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2019

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - providing new leaders with the support they require to establish their strategies for improvement
 - refining strategic planning processes to focus on the most important issues and the impact of leaders' actions
 - raising leaders' and governors' expectations of staff and pupils
 - ensuring that systems to monitor the quality of teaching take account of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and outcomes
 - ensuring that all pupils benefit from a suitable curriculum that prepares them well for their next steps
 - ensuring that pupil premium and catch-up funding is fully evaluated for effectiveness
 - ensuring that external support helps to raise pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that governors form an objective and accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness in all areas of its work.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and raise pupils' achievement, by:
 - raising staff expectations of what different groups of pupils can achieve, particularly the most able and disadvantaged
 - ensuring that the arrangement of classes and resources enables staff to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities
 - ensuring that leaders find ways to improve the learning environment, particularly the acoustics, so that it is more conducive to high-quality teaching and learning
 - providing teachers with the training required to ensure that assessment is accurate and used to promote strong progress
 - ensuring that the feedback provided to pupils to help them improve their work is applied consistently in different subjects across the school
 - ensuring that staff plan and deliver teaching that enables them to meet the demands of the new national curriculum.
- Improve personal development, welfare and behaviour, by:
 - improving the attendance of different groups of pupils
 - developing pupils' attitudes to learning so that there are fewer instances of off-task behaviour
 - reducing rates of exclusion for different groups of pupils

- ensuring that all pupils have access to high-quality careers advice and guidance.
- Improve provision in early years, by ensuring that:
 - the curriculum is developed to enable children to better meet all the early learning goals
 - the learning environment, both inside and outside, is improved for children in Reception.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 19 to 20 November 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive headteacher, interim headteacher, and senior and faculty leaders. Discussions also took place with three governors and with senior staff from Reach South Academy Trust (the trust), which is providing much of the external support to the school.

Inspectors visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils.

Context

Since the inspection in January 2019, the headteacher has left the school. Several teachers have also left the school and new colleagues have joined. A significant number of staff are currently absent from work for extended periods of time. The number of pupils on roll has decreased. A large number of external consultants are working with the school, several from the trust.

The regional schools commissioner (RSC) is currently considering the future sponsorship of the school. There is no confirmed sponsor in place. The trust has been commissioned by the RSC to provide leadership support to the school. This includes the secondment, on a part-time basis, of an interim executive headteacher. This support is due to finish at the end of the autumn term.

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

Governors' and leaders' work to improve the school has been too slow. There is a lack of a systematic approach to evaluating the extent of weaknesses in the school to inform improvement plans. Leaders have given insufficient focus on the design of the curriculum and ensuring that pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), reach their potential.

Leaders have not set out a clear teaching and learning strategy. The focus is too narrow on the establishment of basic routines and not on the substance of education. The changes leaders have made so far are not bringing about the improvements that are needed desperately.

Teaching staff are not sufficiently knowledgeable or skilled to successfully implement the school's approach to the teaching of foundation subjects, especially in key stage 3. Consequently, pupils are ill-prepared for the next stage in their education. In key stages 3 and 4 the curriculum is narrowed, and so pupils do not experience the full range of subjects that they should. Across subjects and phases, curriculum plans lack clarity and the criteria against which staff assess pupils' attainment. As a result,

leaders and governors do not receive the information they need to make strategic decisions to improve pupils' outcomes.

Leaders do not monitor the work of class teachers and teaching assistants closely enough to ensure that the provision for pupils with SEND is matched to pupils' specific needs. The governors have not ensured that there is sufficient leadership capacity to monitor this aspect of the school's work, although there are plans in place to tackle this in the near future.

Leaders have not ensured that there is a cohesive strategy in place to rapidly improve the outcomes of the high number of disadvantaged pupils. Staff have not identified the barriers to these pupils' learning. Consequently, teaching staff do not know how best to help these pupils. However, the school's work to improve disadvantaged pupils' experience of cultural events is strong.

Senior leaders have spent much of their time reviewing the practical operation of the school buildings. Partition walls have been built to better demarcate learning spaces. These, along with additional sound attenuation panels, have also helped to reduce the noise in the school. However, noise levels are still high and this does not help pupils to focus on their work and, for many older pupils, they are easily distracted.

Where leaders have introduced new systems to improve pupils' behaviour, staff are not implementing them consistently. Many staff do not have the skills or expertise to manage pupils' behaviour well. Although expectations of pupils' conduct are being raised, expectations are still too low. Incidents of poor behaviour are not reducing. School records show that the number of incidents of poor behaviour remains high and has risen over recent months. The number of rewards, on the other hand, have declined. Exclusions are high although these have fallen in recent weeks.

Poor attendance is a significant concern for the school. One fifth of the pupils are persistently absent. Disadvantaged pupils continue to attend less frequently than their classmates. Leaders have put new processes in place, which means there is now a reliable record of pupils' attendance. The work to improve attendance has not yet had the impact needed because of staff absence and a lack of resource to implement it fully.

Nonetheless, teachers are keen to improve their own knowledge and skills. They are aware that there is much to do but they are willing to take a team approach to ensure that the school improves rapidly.

In the school improvement plan, leaders have highlighted the need to strengthen the school's work on careers education. This has been prioritised. Leaders have appointed a careers lead who is benefiting from the support of the trust and one of its schools. She has carried out an audit of the school's work and is beginning to draft a plan to improve the school's careers offer and the cohesion of the

programme. However, it is early days and the provision for careers advice and guidance is still ad hoc.

In early years, the learning environment has been improved and is well thought through. New schemes of learning are being used which are fit for purpose. The new leader has set about implementing the new vision for the early years and has planned the stages of this implementation carefully. This is at the early stages of development.

Leaders, staff and governors have done much to improve relationships with parents. Opportunities to meet governors and members of staff have been taken up by many. Parents are now much more supportive of the school and the decisions that governors and leaders have to make.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and governors have not ensured that staff receive the specific support needed to improve the quality of education. Governors do not have a clear understanding of their role and statutory duties as the proprietor of the school. They have left too much to leaders who do not have the capacity that the school requires. The school is wholly reliant on external support, principally from the trust. There is no long-term surety that this arrangement will continue.

Leaders and governors have not ensured that other agencies, such as children's social care, are held robustly to account for their part in safeguarding pupils. There are examples of school leaders challenging other agencies' views, but these are not always recorded well. The school's procedures and record-keeping arrangements are not suitably robust.

Governors are not fulfilling their statutory duties well. There is insufficient regard to the quality of education and the health, safety and welfare of pupils. Governors are far too accepting of leaders' responses. They have not had the training they need to fully understand their role and responsibility as the school's proprietor.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders' work to improve both the curriculum and the learning environment in the early years is starting to be seen. There is a clear vision and it is beginning to bring about the necessary changes.
- Leaders' work to improve the relationship with the school's sponsor, Plymouth College of Art, is providing high-quality teaching for Year 11 pupils in the creative arts. It is also providing pupils with useful careers guidance.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school's arrangements to improve the quality of education do not give sufficient thought to the knowledge pupils should acquire, curriculum organisation and assessment.
- Governors, who are the proprietor of the school, have not taken decisive actions to ensure that the school has the leadership needed to drive improvement forward swiftly.

External support

Leaders and staff have received most of the support from the trust. This has included the secondment of a part-time executive headteacher and the involvement of other trust staff to support school leaders. Reviews by the local authority have identified actions to be taken to bring about much-needed change, particularly with respect to the provision for pupils with SEND. However, leaders have not implemented their recommendations. Leaders have also forged links with other schools in the city. These provide some useful training for staff to improve their subject knowledge.

Specialist acoustics consultants and architects have been heavily involved in making interim modifications to the fabric of the building to dampen noise. They have developed plans to improve ventilation, heating and acoustics.