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Mr Wayne Lloyd
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Dear Mr Lloyd

Special measures monitoring inspection of Felixstowe Academy

Following my visit with Anthony Bishop, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 15–16 January 2020, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2017. 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I recommend the school continue 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 Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
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 with SEND 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 with SEND
 - restoring positive relationships with parents so that they have confidence in the school's leadership.

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

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 15–16 January 2020

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documents and samples of pupils' work. They met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders, some staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors also met with the chief executive officer of the Unity Schools Partnership trust, members of the governing body and curriculum leaders from a local trust school. In addition, inspectors considered the views of a number of parents about aspects of the school's work.

Context

The school joined the Unity Schools Partnership at the beginning of September 2019. There have been some changes to the composition of the senior leadership team and to staffing since the previous monitoring visit took place at the end of October 2019. A new chair of governors has been appointed.

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

The effectiveness of the curriculum and of teaching, though still too uneven, is improving. Since the last monitoring visit, changes to curriculum plans, including in English, mathematics and science, have been extensive and well-judged. These plans set out what pupils need to learn and remember to deepen their knowledge and to be able to apply it readily. Visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that these plans are starting to impact positively on pupils' learning. Pupils are completing tasks that develop their knowledge and understanding, and that engage them, more consistently than previously. This is particularly the case in key stage 3. These improvements are recent.

Some teachers are teaching the new curriculum more expertly than others, which means the progress different pupils make in the same subject is too variable. When teaching is most effective, teachers check pupils' prior knowledge and understanding, correct misconceptions and set tasks that help pupils build on what they know. Some teachers use questioning well to promote debate and to deepen thinking. At other times, teachers pose interesting questions to pupils but answer them themselves. Sometimes all pupils complete the same work when that is not appropriate or are moved on to new learning before their existing knowledge is secure. A few teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do. Too often, pupils cannot recall what they have learned quickly or fluently enough.

Some pupils' low literacy levels continue to limit their learning. Leaders have improved the systems to identify these pupils, so that they receive the help they need more quickly. Teachers are working as 'literacy champions' within each subject department, reinforcing the need for pupils to use spelling, punctuation and

grammar appropriately. Other than in English, pupils have too few opportunities to complete extended writing tasks. Some pupils continue to need more help to improve their reading. Leaders have trialled an intensive support programme with a small number of these pupils. This has been successful. Detailed plans are in place to increase the number of pupils who will benefit from this tuition.

Leaders are working to ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive the support that they need to access the curriculum. Pupils' education, health and care plans are typically of high quality, and leaders are making sure that teachers know pupils' needs and how to meet them. Leaders regularly visit lessons and scrutinise work to check that pupils are receiving any additional help that they need and that it is effective. During visits to lessons, inspectors found that appropriate support enabled pupils to complete their work. Where teaching is effective, therefore, typically pupils with SEND benefit from this to the same extent as others.

Since the previous monitoring visit, leaders have sharpened their plans to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils and accelerated their implementation. Pupils are benefiting from access to additional resources, including revision materials, and support to close gaps in their knowledge. This is particularly benefiting Year 11 pupils, and especially in English and mathematics. However, leaders acknowledge that there is more to be done to identify and remove the barriers that prevent individuals from learning well. One of these barriers is attendance; the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent remains above the national average.

The school's own information indicates that the incidence of bullying has continued to decline. Leaders have encouraged pupils to report any bullying, and most pupils who spoke with inspectors think that it is responded to effectively. Leaders are also checking to make sure that issues do not continue. At the time of the previous monitoring visit, some pupils said that they often heard homophobic or racist language but did not report it. Leaders have educated pupils about why this is wrong and the consequences that it can have. Pupils are now reporting any incidents that concern them, and when they do so, leaders respond and periodically check to see if issues are ongoing. Most pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they rarely, if ever, hear such language now.

Behaviour in lessons has continued to improve. Most pupils who spoke with inspectors think that the behaviour policy is being applied more consistently than at the time of the previous monitoring visit. The number of fixed-term exclusions, which increased sharply after the introduction of the new behaviour policy, has fallen back as pupils respond to the school's higher expectations. The same is true of internal exclusions. Leaders are using their clear analysis of where and why misbehaviour happens to support teachers where necessary. They are also working effectively to help those pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour to improve it. It remains the case that in too many lessons, a minority of pupils engage

in disruptive behaviour. When teachers are slow to apply the school's behaviour policy, this disruption persists and limits learning.

Pupils' attendance has increased slightly but remains too low, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Since the last monitoring visit, leaders have worked to tighten their monitoring of the absence of individual pupils. As a result, they are intervening more quickly when a pupil's attendance dips. These new systems have only been recently introduced.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last visit, leaders have worked with urgency to ensure that the school is back on track. Effective action is being taken by the trust to tackle the school's most significant weaknesses. Leaders have accelerated the pace of improvement, particularly in respect of the curriculum, teaching and behaviour. Senior leaders and curriculum leaders, including from another local school within the trust, have worked together to improve subject curriculum plans. Leaders are enabling teachers to implement these plans by providing them with well-targeted training. Newly qualified teachers are positive about the support that they receive from senior leaders.

Leaders are managing teachers' workload more effectively. This means that teachers have more time to plan activities that engage pupils and help them access the curriculum. Senior leaders are working with subject leaders to monitor the impact of these new curriculum arrangements closely. Difficult decisions have been made where standards have not been high enough. Leaders acknowledge that there is much more to do so that all pupils benefit from the improvements that are being made.

Leaders have reviewed the way in which they respond to some of the most serious safeguarding issues. Through additional staff training and changes to procedures, they have ensured that individuals know what they need to do when responding to such issues. Leaders, and trust representatives, have put appropriate checks in place that confirm staff are following statutory safeguarding guidance. In other respects, the school's safeguarding arrangements remain secure. Safeguarding records are well kept. Pupils are typically well supported with the issues they face. All the pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they felt safe at school.

The school is benefiting from close oversight by trust employees, the executive headteacher, trustees and governors. Senior trust staff and trustees are working with leaders extensively, supporting their work and monitoring progress towards the school's action plan at monthly meetings. This provides them with a very clear view of what is getting better and what needs to improve more quickly. Members of the local governing body are experienced, have high expectations and visit the school regularly to scrutinise aspects of its work such as safeguarding. They are asking leaders incisive questions. Governors have asked leaders for more detailed

information about attendance and behaviour, for example. This is sharpening leaders' own analysis of trends which is, in turn, helping to inform their decision-making about how to drive further improvement.

Leaders and the trust are working to increase the extent to which they engage with parents. Regular opportunities for parents to meet with the headteacher and other senior leaders exist. Many parents have taken these up. Leaders have issued questionnaires to parents and have met with many to discuss their responses. Leaders were able to discuss changes that they have made as a result, such as making telephone rather than text-based contact with parents whenever a pupil receives a sanction. Parent representatives are about to join the local governing body. Despite this work, parental views on the school remain mixed. The views of those parents who have completed surveys while attending school events are markedly more positive overall than are those who have recorded their views via Ofsted's Parent View survey.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders, including trust leaders, have accelerated the pace of change significantly since the time of the previous monitoring visit. These changes are planned thoughtfully and prioritised sensibly.
- Senior leaders are working effectively with curriculum leaders and others to draw up and implement new curriculum plans that are helping to build pupils' knowledge.
- Teachers are benefiting from precisely focused training and support. Leaders are managing their workload, so that teachers focus on what is most important.
- The curriculum in English is improving, and teaching is strengthening in this subject.
- Leaders are doing more to ensure that teachers follow policies and procedures, including those relating to behaviour management and provision for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- Leaders have acted to reduce bullying and the incidence with which pupils use homophobic or racist language.
- The new behaviour policy is being applied more consistently by teachers. This is reducing the extent of disruption to pupils' learning.
- Leaders are ensuring that staff follow statutory guidance when responding to the most serious safeguarding incidents.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Work to reduce pupils' absence has had insufficient impact.
- Poor behaviour on the part of a minority of pupils continues to disrupt learning.

- Too many teachers use approaches that do not enable pupils to learn new things and to remember them readily.
- Work to improve pupils' literacy skills and to remove the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils is at an early stage. Many pupils have gaps in their learning as they have not benefited from this work.

External support

The school is not receiving support from outside of the trust. Leaders from another local trust school are helping subject leaders to revise curriculum and assessment plans. They are also sharing teaching resources and ideas. Staff appreciate and are benefiting significantly as a result of this work.