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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 Linda Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 February 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 third 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers. I recommend that any newly qualified teachers are recruited in appropriate number and they are provided with opportunities to access high-quality subject-specific training through the trust.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Great Academy Education Trust (GAET), 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 third monitoring inspection on 4 February 2020 to 5 February 2020

Evidence

We checked on pupils' work and visited lessons. We reviewed a range of documentation, including leaders' improvement plans. We met with the acting principal, acting deputy principal and other school leaders. We also met with four GAET consultants.

The lead inspector met with the CEO and two members of the local governing committee, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector also spoke on the telephone with the interim chair of the trust's executive board.

We met with three groups of pupils and three groups of staff. These groups of staff included subject leaders, teachers and other staff. An inspector reviewed leaders' checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. We discussed matters relating to safeguarding and pupils' behaviour with school leaders, staff and pupils.

Context

The acting principal and acting deputy principal remain in post. They will remain at the school until the end of the current academic year. Since the last monitoring visit, a new principal has been appointed. The new principal will take up their role in September 2020. They will take up the post of principal designate in June 2020 and work alongside the current acting principal and acting deputy principal until the end of the academic year.

The trust's outcomes board continues to hold responsibility for the school's governance. Four members of a newly formed local governing committee (LGC) have been appointed since the previous inspection, including the chair of the LGC. It is anticipated that the trust will delegate responsibilities for the school's governance following a period of transition.

Since the last monitoring inspection, an assistant principal has left the school; two temporary assistant principals have had their posts made permanent; two interim associate assistant principals have been appointed and a new second in department in mathematics has taken up their post.

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

Standards are getting better at Copley Academy. The school is on a trajectory of improvement. Subject leaders are ensuring that key stage 3 curriculums are as ambitious as the national curriculum. There have been considerable improvements

in several subjects, including English, history, languages and science. However, there are still some subjects where curriculum planning remains in its infancy. Many subject leaders have considered carefully the order in which they want pupils to learn about different topics. For example, in science, leaders have ensured that pupils learn about atoms and elements before they learn about the periodic table. In those subjects where curriculum plans are well developed, leaders provide teachers with detailed information about what to teach pupils and when.

For the most part, teachers deliver the intended curriculum. This means that pupils can build effectively on their prior learning. However, there are still occasions when pupils have not covered some of the most important content for future learning. This is especially the case for older pupils who have not benefited from a well-planned key stage 3 curriculum in the past.

Many teachers use assessment well to identify the gaps in pupils' learning. Staff use their subject knowledge to address pupils' misconceptions and provide clear explanations. For example, in mathematics, teachers identify and address pupils' mistakes in algebra. That said, some teachers do not use assessment consistently well to identify and address pupils' errors.

Leaders have introduced effective systems to ensure that the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified. As a result, more pupils with SEND benefit from appropriate support. This is especially the case for those pupils with SEND who require help from external agencies. Leaders have also ensured that teachers can access important information about this group of pupils' needs. This means that more teachers can adapt the curriculum well for pupils with SEND. That said, this is not done consistently well across subjects and year groups.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is identifying those pupils who have fallen behind in their reading. These pupils are starting to receive appropriate support to catch up.

The improvements seen in pupils' behaviour and attendance at the last monitoring inspection have continued. Staff are confident that senior leaders will support them well to manage pupils' behaviour. Leaders have raised their expectations for pupils' conduct during lessons and around the school. Staff and pupils have a clear understanding of these expectations. Pupils understand the consequences of any poor behaviour.

Pupils and staff who we spoke with, told us that they experience less disruption during lessons than they did in the past. There have been no permanent exclusions during the current academic year. Those pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour receive appropriate support. This helps them to improve their conduct. Leaders use exclusions correctly and only as a last resort. Better relationships between staff, pupils and their families mean that more pupils attend school regularly. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

After a long period of instability and uncertainty, more parents and carers have faith in leaders' ability to improve the school. An increasing proportion of parents are more assured that their children are happy and safe in school. More parents feel better informed about how well their children are doing at school. Parents are increasingly positive about the improvements in standards of behaviour.

Senior leaders provide staff with support to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Teachers have confidence in school behaviour systems. They explained to us that they can now focus on planning and delivering the curriculum. Staff told us that senior leaders are considerate of their well-being and they appreciate the effective support they receive.

Following essential improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes, senior leaders have been able to focus on improving the quality of education for pupils. Additional help from consultants within the trust is ensuring that subject leaders design curriculum plans that are fit for purpose. For example, support from a subject specialist is having a positive effect on how well the science curriculum is planned and delivered. Many subject leaders support teachers effectively to better deliver subject-specific content over time. That said, this is not done consistently well across subject areas.

Further support through the trust is also helping leaders to improve the quality of education for pupils with SEND. There are already signs that this support is having a positive effect. For instance, this group of pupils attend school more often, and they are less likely to be excluded from school for poor behaviour than in the past.

Those responsible for governance fulfil their statutory duties effectively. The trust's outcomes board holds senior leaders to account diligently. The CEO continues to check on all aspects of the school's performance closely to ensure that leaders' improvements are sustained.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Many subject leaders have considered carefully the order in which they want pupils to learn new content. This is particularly the case in English, history, languages and science. Mostly, teachers deliver the intended curriculum. Improvements in how the curriculum is being planned and delivered mean that pupils can build more effectively on their prior learning. This is especially the case for younger pupils.
- Leaders have introduced effective systems to ensure that more pupils with SEND are identified and they can benefit from appropriate support.

- Staff and pupils have a clear understanding of leaders' expectations and the consequences of poor behaviour. Pupils and staff told us that they experience less disruption to their learning than they have done in the past.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- In a small number of subjects, curriculum plans do not provide teachers with enough information about the content they should cover and when. Nor do they help teachers to deliver this content effectively over time. As a result, weaknesses remain in how well the curriculum is implemented.

External support

The Rodillian Trust continues to provide support for the school at senior leadership level. This support has had an irrefutable positive impact on improving pupils' behaviour and staff morale. Very few temporary teachers are now being used.

An independent consultant is providing support for the SENCo. This support is ensuring that appropriate systems are in place to identify the needs of pupils with SEND. A second independent consultant is also providing support for mathematics. Alongside support from the trust, this external help is beginning to have a positive impact on how well the mathematics curriculum is planned in key stage 3.

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