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Amanda Phillips
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Dear Ms Phillips

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ipswich Academy

Following my visit with Kathryn Herlock, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 July 2016, 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 January 2015. 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, the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of the Paradigm Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching, including the sixth form, so that it is at least consistently good, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have strong subject knowledge and the skills to assess students' progress accurately
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve and use assessment information to plan lessons effectively to meet the needs of the different groups of students
 - mark students' work regularly and offer high quality feedback which helps students understand how they can improve their work
 - extend students' understanding of their work by using effective questioning and verbal feedback and by setting appropriate homework
 - develop appropriate strategies in the classroom to increase the confidence and skills of students so they have a thirst for knowledge.
- Improve the rates of students' progress in all key stages, including the sixth form, and so raise standards by:
 - speeding up the pace of learning to enable students to make the best possible progress
 - ensuring that all students receive appropriately challenging work, especially the most able
 - making better use of pupil premium funding to close the gaps in students' attainment and progress
 - improving students' levels of literacy in Key Stage 3
 - thoroughly planning all subjects in Key Stage 3 to ensure students can make consistent and even progress
 - reviewing admissions criteria and the advice and guidance given to students in Key Stages 3 and 4 to help them make more appropriate choices for sixth form study.
- Improve students' behavior and attitudes to learning by:
 - ensuring that low level disruption is rare and that students take pride in their presentation of their work
 - establishing thorough and robust systems to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.
- Rapidly improve the quality and impact of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring the school's improvement plans are thorough, realistic and monitored effectively
 - making certain that senior and subject managers have the correct skills and experience to secure rapid improvement in the quality of teaching, behaviour and, in doing so, achievement

- increasing the capacity of governance, at all levels, to ensure it accurately challenges the leaders of the school and is able to hold them to account by independently assessing standards
- developing an effective whole-school approach to raising standards in literacy
- promoting opportunities in the curriculum for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to positively influence students' attitudes to learning
- ensuring appropriate professional development is provided, to teachers and leaders at the school, through a more thorough and rigorous performance management system.

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

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 July 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, senior and middle leaders, three senior leaders from Bethnal Green Academy, an external consultant, a member of the interim executive board and two groups of pupils. A telephone conference call was held with the chair of the interim executive board. A representative of the local authority attended the final feedback meeting.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, arrangements have been made for 13 members of staff to leave the school at the end of this term and for 21 new staff to join in September 2016.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive principal continues to provide the school with a strong steer for its improvement. She and her team of senior leaders have maintained their efforts to raise expectations and embed the improvements noted at the time of the last monitoring inspection. Senior leaders' self-evaluation acknowledges that the school is moving towards the removal of special measures, but there remains a lot still to do.

School leaders have rightly prioritised ensuring that pupils in Year 11 are fully prepared for their final examinations this term. They have insisted that all coursework requirements are met by the set deadlines. Experienced staff from a partner school have been engaged to help teachers of construction and drama ensure that pupils complete all work and are entered for examinations. The school has opened its doors before and after school, at weekends and during the holidays to enable pupils to revise in the study support area and keep in regular contact with their teachers.

Targets and timescales in the school's improvement plans are routinely checked to gauge the rate of improvement, and identify where further action is needed to resolve the issues raised in the last inspection. Expectations of staff remain high; they continue to be held accountable for contribution to the school's overall improvement.

Extensive support and training for staff are having mixed results. Some have responded positively and are showing clear signs of increased effectiveness. Others have not and consequently they will be leaving the school at the end of this term. Senior leaders recognise that despite additional training and support, not enough middle leaders, particularly those leading core and foundation subjects, understand

fully how to secure improvements to the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils. An overhaul of pastoral and subject leadership is currently under way.

A wider range of opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is helping to promote their better behaviour and attitudes towards learning. For example, assemblies now focus on pupils' positive behaviours around school, modelling good manners and coping with the demands of their academic studies. Extra-curricular activities, particularly for pupils in Years 11 and 7, are enriching their social skills, cultural awareness and enjoyment.

The interim executive board has maintained its support and challenge for senior leaders to secure improvements. Minutes of regular meetings show that tough questions are being asked about the school's performance and the rate of improvement being made. Its members, particularly those from the trust board and senior leaders from partner schools, provide a wealth of knowledge and experience of school improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

At the time of the last monitoring inspection, teaching was becoming more consistent, but some of it remained ineffective. This continues to be the case. Inspectors observed good practice in a range of subjects, particularly computing, food technology, humanities and French. However, the school's target for the proportion of good or better teaching secured by this stage of the year has not been met.

Senior leaders know where the most and least effective teaching lies. They have not balked from taking action where, despite additional training and support, teaching is still not good enough. Further staff changes are planned for next term to strengthen teaching. Some of the new appointments made are inexperienced. However, senior leaders feel that they will be responsive to training and will bring additional energy, enthusiasm and vitality to the school.

There are signs of increasing consistency. For example, the school's agreed procedures to manage pupils' behaviour are being used regularly by most staff. During questioning, teachers are engaging more pupils in learning by asking them to talk with their partner before answering. Most teachers are following the school's guidance for marking pupils' work. Pupils told inspectors that they find the comments written in their books really helpful. Inspectors noted that when lessons include opportunities for pupils to do practical work, use computers and tools, and work together in small groups, they readily engage in learning and make good progress.

Only a minority of teachers feel fully confident to use these techniques. Too much teaching observed is dull and fails to spark pupils' interest. Often, teachers struggle to maintain pupils' attention and their work rate throughout the 100-minute lessons. From September onwards, this will be minimised by reducing lessons to 60 minutes long.

The most effective teaching has been directed towards accelerating the progress and filling gaps in the knowledge and understanding of Year 11 pupils so they are ready for examinations. The quality of teaching in key stage 3 is less effective. In some subjects, an over-reliance on temporary staff has limited the sustained progress made by pupils. Senior leaders acknowledge that the most effective practice now needs to permeate throughout both key stages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school remains a calm and orderly place to be. At breaks and lunchtimes, and moving between lessons, pupils mix well together and behave themselves. When asked, pupils in key stage 3 unanimously agreed that behaviour is getting better. They generally feel safe, but say that when incidents of bullying occur, more could be done to stop it happening again.

In lessons, the school's agreed procedures to manage and record poor behaviour are applied more consistently. Most pupils understand the consequences of poor behaviour and the actions that will be taken if they misbehave. Pupils say that some low-level disruption by a small minority of pupils regularly affects their learning. They also feel that rewards for good behaviour and for simply doing the right things should be awarded more often by staff.

Recent training on monitoring pupils' day-to-day progress is beginning to make an impact. Increasingly, staff are checking the quality and quantity of work in pupils' books during lessons. Correcting basic errors and insisting on good presentation remain weaknesses in some subjects.

Attendance continues to rise towards the national average due to the sustained efforts of staff to deal with persistent absence. Pupils are much more punctual at the start of the day and for each lesson.

Outcomes for pupils

The projected outcomes for Year 11 pupils this year remain unchanged. Overall results are expected to be a lot better. Senior leaders have done everything they can to help these pupils catch up and achieve what they are capable of attaining.

Actions to raise achievement have been directed towards all pupils, including those known to be disadvantaged. Current assessment data shows that disadvantaged and other pupils are achieving better than they have in the past and that gaps in performance should begin to close this year.

Greater rigour has been added to the assessment of pupils' progress in all years and particularly in key stage 3, where data collected in the past has proved unreliable. Pupils in all year groups now do regular tests in lessons and have sat internal mock examinations in all subjects this year to gauge how well they are doing.

Pupils have been reorganised into groups of similar ability. This is enabling teachers to plan learning suited to the most able pupils and to those who may need additional support. This is at an early stage of development; pupils in the most able classes are not always fully stretched, particularly in some English, mathematics and science lessons, because expectations of what they are capable of achieving are not high enough.

In lessons, progress is wholly dependent on the quality of teaching. Most pupils behave well enough but when allowed to, they relax and let others do the work for them. When tasks do not capture and retain their interest, some disengage from learning and progress slows. In a range of subjects, the quality and quantity of work in books illustrate that not all pupils, especially boys, make enough progress over time.

The school's 'fresh-start' programme continues to improve the basic literacy skills of a small proportion of pupils in Years 7 and 8. Suitable resources are being used effectively with individuals and in small groups to boost their confidence and competence. Increasing use of 'talking partners' in lessons is strengthening pupils' oracy skills. Inspectors noted that in some Year 9 lessons, pupils' books show that a significant proportion of them continue to struggle with their handwriting, grammar and the presentation of their work.

External support

Good use is made of the trust's links with other schools in London to train and support teachers. Locally, strong links with another secondary school provide regular support and opportunities for senior leaders to discuss ideas and share best practice. The full impact of support and training provided by staff within the trust, its partner schools and a range of external consultants has not been fully evaluated to gauge what support is working, and what is not. For example, improvements are evident in aspects of the school's leadership and in teaching. However, despite the high level of external support provided, some teaching and middle leadership remains ineffective.