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Sofia Darr
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Dear Ms Darr

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waverley Studio College

Following my visit with David Smith, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18 and 19 May 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 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. I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) before the next monitoring inspection. However, please contact the monitoring inspector to discuss any circumstances where you may wish to appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2015

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or outstanding by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about students' progress, prior knowledge and understanding, to match work to their needs
 - embedding high expectations of what students can achieve and how students should behave in all lessons
 - promoting the reading, writing and mathematical skills of students in subjects outside English and mathematics
 - ensuring that students improve their work and skills based on high-quality guidance offered by their teachers
 - embedding recent systems to monitor and check the quality of teaching so that teachers are provided with regular feedback on how to improve their practice
 - securing the appointment of high-quality permanent teachers.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that robust systems are in place to monitor and track the progress of students from an accurate baseline of their starting points on entry to the college, including for those students with disabilities or special educational needs
 - making sure that plans for improvement address key priorities that are identified through rigorous self-evaluation and that these plans are linked to measurable targets so that the intended impact of actions can be evaluated
 - developing the skills of all leaders so that they have the capacity to bring about essential improvements to the quality of teaching and achievement of students
 - ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of all students, including those students with weaker basic skills on entry and the most-able students
 - evaluating the impact of the spending of pupil premium funding more thoroughly so that leaders and governors know which strategies are working best
 - carefully checking the accuracy of teachers' assessment of students' work in all subjects
 - making more systematic checks on teachers' planning and students' work to ensure that examination requirements are fully met
 - providing governors with robust and accurate information about the progress of students.

- Increase attendance so that it is in line with or better than that of other schools nationally by strengthening the range of strategies used to engage with parents and other agencies.

- Improve achievement at both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 by:
 - rigorously tracking the progress of all students and groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, across subject areas so that underachievement can be quickly identified and tackled
 - implementing well-planned programmes to support students with weaker basic skills on entry so that they can catch up with their peers.

An external review of governance, and of the college's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18 May 2016 to 19 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work. They scrutinised documents, monitoring and assessment records, and pupils' work. They met with the principal, senior and subject leaders, the chair of the local governing body, a representative of the board of trustees of Waverley Education Foundation Trust, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust and groups of pupils. Because of the number of examinations and revision sessions taking place at the time of the monitoring inspection, only seven lessons were observed – all jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors observed behaviour around the school and attended an assembly.

Context

The school moved to new, purpose-built premises in February 2016. The vice-principal left at Easter and has been replaced by a temporary vice-principal. The subject leader for science left at Easter and has been replaced by a subject specialist supply teacher, who is supported by the associate assistant headteacher for science at Waverley School. A teacher of creative media left the school during the spring term and has been replaced by a subject specialist supply teacher. Each of these posts are currently being advertised.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal's leadership skills, her disciplined focus on developing effective systems, and the encouragement and clear direction she provides staff, are key to the improvements being made. Like her, all staff are thoroughly committed to the success of the school and its pupils.

The move to new premises has allowed the school to develop its own identity and has enhanced its culture of respect for all and high expectations. Pupils are very positive about the move and talk about this being 'their school' – a place they are proud of. Parents are increasingly supportive of the school.

The leadership and management of teaching and learning have improved and now involve effective processes to quality assure provision and to support and intervene where underperformance is identified. The positive impact of this is evident in the improved quality of teaching and learning. Greater stability in staffing, robust systems and strengthened lines of accountability allow leaders to hold teachers to account more effectively.

Leadership capacity is developing. The involvement of subject leaders in the monitoring of teaching and learning and in taking on whole-school responsibilities

contributes to this. However, there is still a need to develop greater leadership capacity to secure progress in the long term.

A large proportion of pupils join the school with reading ages well below their chronological age. A range of strategies are in place to support and develop their literacy skills. These are having a positive impact in raising reading ages and improving writing and presentation skills. However, more still needs to be done on a cross-subject level to ensure that all pupils can succeed in their academic subjects.

Following a review of the use of pupil premium funding, the school is now ensuring that funding is directed specifically to pupils who are eligible and that there is more detailed analysis of impact to ensure that funding is used as effectively as possible.

The broad and balanced curriculum includes academic and vocational courses as well as opportunities for enrichment and additional support sessions. Due to the turbulence of staffing in the first year of the school, current leaders and staff are working hard to ensure that Year 11 pupils catch up on missed curriculum time by providing a wide range of catch-up sessions throughout the week and on Saturdays.

The studio schools' CREATE agenda is developing and there is good attention to careers advice, work experience and the development of work-related skills. A strong focus is placed on the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and of their understanding and acceptance of British values. The school meets all safeguarding requirements and relevant policies are thorough and up to date. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The school has implemented a carefully thought-out strategy to ensure that pupils are kept safe from the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism. All staff have undertaken appropriate training in this area.

Governors' knowledge about the school and their understanding of, and confidence in, their roles are improving. However, currently most of the challenge to the principal about pupils' outcomes comes from the CEO rather than from governors. A review of governance has taken place and an improvement plan has been drawn up that includes an appropriate focus on training to develop governors' knowledge and understanding of their roles, of data about pupils' outcomes and of the importance of providing effective challenge to school leaders.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

School records indicate that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been improving over time. This is a result of effective monitoring, rigorous quality assurance systems, including external moderation, and helpful support and professional development. The impact of improved teaching is reflected in the improved progress pupils are now making in their learning.

Teachers create calm and productive learning environments in their classrooms.

They use information about pupils' achievement effectively to plan their teaching and to determine appropriate help for pupils needing additional support. Particular strengths in teaching include planning, teachers' subject knowledge and their use of carefully designed learning activities to help pupils make progress from their individual starting points. Pupils take their studies seriously and respond well to high levels of challenge when this is provided. However, in some cases, teachers' questioning does not ensure that all pupils are challenged effectively or given the opportunity to think hard and develop their oral responses.

Teachers' use of the school's marking policy is contributing effectively to enabling pupils to improve the quality of their work and the rate at which they make progress. The strong focus on correcting pupils' spelling and grammar in their written work is an important feature in this school where all pupils join in Year 10, approximately 75% have English as an additional language, and a large proportion have weak written skills.

Support assistants make a valuable contribution to teaching and learning, particularly in their support of underperforming pupils, those who have special educational needs or disability and those in the early stages of learning English.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Attendance continues to improve and has been sustained above the national average since September 2015. Attendance officers and learning coaches provide a highly effective and rapid response to pupil absence. Exclusions have fallen rapidly since 2015 and no pupils attend alternative provision outside of school. School records indicate significant improvement in pupils' behaviour. However, while behaviour around the school and in lessons is often exemplary, there are occasions where behaviour is not as disciplined, for example if a lesson is taught by a short-term supply teacher.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and thrive in its culture of respect for all and high expectations. Excellent relations exist between staff and pupils. The support provided by learning coaches has been a key factor in improvements in behaviour and attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

School data indicates strong improvement in pupils' achievement. For example, only 2% of pupils gained five or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics at grades C or above, in 2015. School records indicate current Year 11 pupils are on track to meet the school's target of 30% in summer 2016. In 2015, only 22% of pupils made the progress expected of them from their starting points in English and only 20% did so in mathematics. Current Year 11 pupils are on track to meet the school's target of 62% making expected progress in English and 52% in mathematics by summer 2016. Despite these rapid improvements, achievement is

still, according to current school information, likely to be well below the government's floor standard in 2016. The picture is different for level 2 vocational courses, where all pupils have already secured at least pass rates.

The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, who form the majority of pupils in this school, and other pupils in the school is narrow or non-existent. However, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is far too wide.

Sixth-form students take a range of vocational courses at level 3. School records indicate that they achieve above the national average for the relevant courses. This builds further on similarly positive results in 2015.

Destination data for 2015 indicates that all students in Year 13 and almost all pupils in Year 11 progressed to appropriate education, training or employment.

External support

The school has forged valuable links with a number of schools as well as Waverley School, its partner school in the trust. This enables regular external moderation of assessment to take place. Effective collaboration with Waverley School in relation to safeguarding and support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability ensures consistency of approach across the trust. Effective collaboration is also apparent in some subject areas, but not in all. While the trust is facilitating support between the school and Waverley School, there is still need for greater clarity of responsibilities in relation to cross-school roles and to ensure appropriate staffing and support is in place as the school roll increases.