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Ms Sofia Darr
Principal
Waverley Studio College
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Dear Ms Darr

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waverley Studio College

Following my visit to your school on 5–6 October 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 third 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 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 that 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 third monitoring inspection on 5–6 October 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, the interim vice-principal, subject leaders and groups of pupils and sixth-form students. Meetings were also held with the chair and vice-chair of the local governing body, and with the chief executive officer, chair and a member of Waverley Education Foundation Trust. Learning walks to a range of lessons were conducted jointly with the interim vice-principal and a scrutiny of pupils' and sixth-form students' workbooks was undertaken. In addition, the inspector observed behaviour around the school and attended a key stage 4 assembly.

Context

An interim vice-principal has replaced the previous vice-principal who left the school at the end of the summer term. The previous lead science teacher has been replaced temporarily by an existing science teacher. Two additional long-term science specialist supply teachers are in post. Long-term specialist supply teachers have also been appointed in mathematics and in art to replace teachers who left the school. Substantive posts are currently being advertised for teachers of mathematics and of art, a lead teacher in science and a vice-principal.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal provides strong leadership and is an excellent role model for staff. She has a clear vision of excellence for the school, and high expectations of staff and of pupils and sixth-form students. She is instrumental in promoting a culture in the school where British values are a key influence across the curriculum. She has introduced robust systems, processes and support that help to minimise the impact of staff turnover on provision and outcomes. These enable new staff at all levels, whether vice-principal or classroom teacher, to quickly adapt and contribute effectively to the school.

The absence to date of a permanent vice-principal is a concern in terms of leadership capacity, as is the turnover of staff in some subject areas. In a small school, the impact of this is heightened. However, the confidence of middle leaders is growing because of the strong support and clear accountability structures the principal has introduced. Some middle leaders have been given whole-school responsibilities, such as curriculum development, assessment and safeguarding, which is providing them with important professional development opportunities and is contributing to improving leadership capacity generally.

Governors' knowledge and understanding of their role is improving. The review of governance included a recommendation for additional training, which is being acted on. Governors are very committed to the school and its aspirations for pupils and sixth-form students. Increasingly, they are able to hold school leaders to account and to challenge the trust about the support it is providing for the studio college. All statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

Positive developments are taking place in the curriculum. School leaders are integrating more effectively the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of the curriculum with promoting British values and with all studio schools' focus on the CREATE agenda. Work experience is undertaken by all pupils in Year 10 and all students in the sixth form. This, and the effective advice and guidance provided, is preparing all pupils and students well for the next steps in their education and employment. For sixth-form students, the close links between work experience and their academic and vocational courses are key contributors to their achievement.

The positive impact of the principal's strong leadership on the curriculum, on the quality of teaching, on behaviour, and on outcomes for pupils and sixth-form students is resulting in a growing reputation for the school. As a result, the number of pupils on roll in September 2016 is a third greater than at the same time in 2015.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils and sixth-form students have good attitudes to learning and respond well to teachers' encouragement. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well to design engaging learning activities. However, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching persist. The pace of learning is not always sufficient to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress. At key stage 4, challenge for middle-ability and the most able pupils is not always strong enough to enable them to make the progress they are capable of. This is linked to the fact that, although high-quality data about pupils' starting points is provided, not all teachers make sufficiently effective use of this to plan and deliver teaching and learning activities that enable all pupils to make good progress.

Where teachers' questioning is strong, it challenges pupils to think deeply and respond at length. However, some teachers are not targeting suitable questions to pupils of different abilities so that all are challenged appropriately. Expectations about the quality of oral responses are not always high enough and too often teachers accept simple, one-word, or very brief and superficial answers. As a result, not all pupils are given opportunities to develop deep thinking skills or the ability and the confidence to provide extended responses.

Assessment is accurate and this is reflected in the close correlation between teachers' estimates of pupils' and sixth-form students' attainment in the summer term and the standards they attained in formal examinations in 2016. Marking and feedback continue to improve in terms of their impact on the progress pupils make in their learning. However, teachers' feedback does not always provide pupils with sufficient challenge to encourage them to really extend their learning and develop higher-order thinking skills.

The school has good strategies to support pupils who require extra help with literacy. Improvements in reading ages reflect this. However, approximately a quarter of pupils in Year 10 have only recently arrived in the UK and are in the early stages of learning English. For these pupils to make the rapid progress required for them to successfully access the key stage 4 curriculum, there is a need for more specialist support.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils and sixth-form students behave very well around the school and in lessons. They show respect for each other, for staff and for visitors. They value their school and the support it provides for them. Well-established routines both in lessons and around the school ensure a calm and productive environment. Support staff contribute very effectively to the strong care and guidance that pupils and sixth-form students receive.

Data about absences and exclusions, and information in the school's incident logs, all indicate substantial and sustained improvement over time in behaviour and personal development.

The school works hard to ensure that pupils and sixth-form students are safe. It ensures that they are well informed about the risks they may face. Pupils and students say they feel very safe at school and are very confident about the systems in place to help them. The rigour of this support extends to their work experience. Support for pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities is strong.

Outcomes for pupils

According to school data, the attainment and rates of progress made by Year 11 pupils have improved significantly in the last year. However, this is from a very low base. For example, in 2015, only 2% of pupils gained five or more GCSEs at grades C or above, including English and mathematics. In 2016, school data indicates that 25% of pupils gained these qualifications. School data on the percentage of pupils achieving a good pass at GCSEs in English and mathematics has improved from 7% in 2015 to 27% in 2016. Similar rates of improvement are evident in terms of the progress pupils have made from their starting points. Evidence from lesson observations support the view that pupils at key stage 4 are making much better progress than previously. However, Progress 8, the new accountability measure, is

still just below the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' progress.

There are few differences between the achievement of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the rate of progress made by middle-ability pupils is not as rapid as that made by least-able and most-able pupils.

Sixth-form achievement is much stronger than that at key stage 4 and has been in each of the last two years. The school's own information about students' attainment and added value in 2016 compares well with the 2015 national average information. In 2015, sixth-form achievement was better than the national average.

The school works effectively to ensure that pupils in Year 11 and students in the sixth form are well prepared for their next steps. As a result, all Year 11 pupils and all sixth-form students move to education, employment or training when they leave this school.

External support

Waverley Education Foundation Trust provides a range of support that is common to both Waverley Studio College and Waverley School (the lead school). This includes human resources support (for example in ensuring safe recruitment and maintaining the single central record) and cross-school policies and procedures (for example in relation to safeguarding and support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities). This helps Waverley Studio College by providing staff with a suitable source of advice and reference. External moderation with a range of other schools, including Waverley School, has been used effectively by subject leaders to assure the accuracy of assessment.