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Mr Gary Carlile
Principal
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Dear Mr Carlile

Special measures monitoring inspection of Skegness Academy

Following my visit with Rachel Tordoff, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 17 and 18 April 2018, 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2017.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Greenwood Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan

Her Majesty's Senior Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2017.

- Improve the quality of leadership by:
 - ensuring that all leaders have the skills required to play an effective role in accelerating school improvement
 - ensuring that the use of the pupil premium funding is monitored efficiently and that it addresses the barriers to learning experienced by all eligible pupils
 - ensuring that the use of the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding is monitored efficiently and that it helps all eligible pupils to catch up with their peers
 - ensuring that the use of the funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is monitored efficiently and that it supports the learning needs of these pupils effectively
 - ensuring that the curriculum prepares pupils for their next stage in their education
 - ensuring that those responsible for governance have effective oversight of the impact of external government funding, including the pupil premium
 - ensuring that those responsible for governance have effective oversight and hold leaders to account to ensure that the school improves rapidly
 - ensuring that those responsible for governance continue to secure high-quality, intensive external support for the school, and that this support is monitored closely to ensure that it has impact for pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - eradicating the inconsistencies in teaching quality
 - ensuring that pupils' literacy and numeracy needs are met.
- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by:
 - ensuring that an effective behaviour policy is in place, is well understood by all staff and is applied consistently
 - eradicating the incidents of poor behaviour, particularly in lessons
 - reducing the number of pupils excluded from school
 - ensuring that all pupils and groups of pupils attend school at rates similar to national averages, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - pupils' attainment and progress at key stage 3 and key stage 4 improve dramatically
 - pupils in the current Year 9 receive intensive support, in order that they have the skills required to study at key stage 4

- disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils with the same starting points
 - pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make the progress that their starting points indicate they should
 - the high proportion of pupils who enter school with attainment that is significantly below the national average are supported effectively to develop the literacy and numeracy skills needed to catch up
 - the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make the progress that they should.
- Improve the 16 to 19 provision by ensuring that:
- the variability in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is addressed
 - students attend more regularly
 - students are helped to catch up, so that they achieve as well as their starting points would indicate that they should
 - students receive intensive support, in order to develop the skills required for studying at this level effectively.

Ofsted recommends that an external review of governance is carried out, in order to improve this aspect of the school.

Ofsted recommends that an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding is carried out, in order to improve this aspect of the school.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 April 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, associate deputy principal, deputy principals, senior assistant principals, assistant principals and a group of staff. Further meetings were held with the chief executive officer, director of education, secondary, and an education adviser from the Greenwood Academies Trust and with a consultant supporting the school. The lead inspector spoke by telephone with an education adviser from the Department for Education and with a member of the academy advisory council. Inspectors spoke formally with three groups of pupils, including the head boy and girl, and informally with others at break and lunchtimes.

Context

The leadership and staffing of the school have undergone significant changes since the previous inspection. Eleven members of staff left the school at the end of the summer term in 2017. A deputy principal and two assistant principals were appointed in September 2017. The principal in post at the time of the previous inspection has since left the school. The school was led by an interim principal for part of the autumn term. A new principal and deputy principal were appointed in January 2018 and the leadership team underwent a further re-structure at this time. An associate deputy principal was seconded to the school in March 2018.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous inspection, the school has undergone significant turbulence in leadership and staffing. The current principal is the school's third since it was judged to require special measures in May 2017, and the leadership team has been re-structured twice since that time. This instability has meant that not all of the planned improvement actions were implemented quickly enough, and not all actions have been effective.

In the wake of the section 5 inspection, leaders drew up an action plan to tackle the areas for improvement identified at that inspection. This action plan set out measures to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including ensuring that the same basic expectations were evident in all lessons. Leaders did not implement these actions with sufficient urgency. Improvements to teaching were not well developed across the school. While some faculties put measures in place to allow teachers to work with each other to improve their practice, this was not done across all faculties and there was a lack of strategic oversight to this area of the school's work. Consequently, many of the weaknesses seen in the teaching at the time of the previous inspection are still in evidence. The information presented to governors at this time was not accurate. For example, in the early stages of the

autumn term, leaders' reports to governors painted an overly positive view of the quality of teaching.

Moreover, staff and some leaders believed that teaching would not improve until pupils' behaviour was tackled properly. In September 2017, leaders introduced a new behaviour policy, setting out a new system of rewards and sanctions for pupils' behaviour. This policy proved ineffective and leaders took the unsettling but necessary step of starting again. A new policy was introduced in November 2017, and there are encouraging signs that it is leading to some improvements, although these are far from consistent across the school.

The school's leadership is now stable, and current senior leaders are a unified and coherent team. Staff and pupils alike told the inspectors that senior leaders are a visible presence around the school. Since their appointment in January 2018, the principal and deputy principal have brought a renewed energy and determination, and the pace of improvement has accelerated. The Greenwood Academies Trust has intensified the level of support that the school receives. Currently, the school is supported by the trust's director of education, secondary; a specialist leader of education, the trust's education adviser and an external consultant. There is therefore increased capacity at present to bring about further improvements.

Leaders now have a much more realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and assessment. There are early signs that the support of the specialist leader of education is proving to be effective. This leader has worked with a core group of staff to draw up the 'non-negotiables' that should be in place for every lesson. Staff told inspectors that they understand exactly what these basic expectations mean for their teaching and value the clarity with which they have been introduced.

New leaders took the decision that the school's action plan needed revising because it was overly complicated and did not enable all leaders to fully understand their roles and responsibilities in carrying out the actions. The new action plan sets out what needs to be done in clear and simple terms and is proving much easier to use. However, in its current form it does not contain future milestones and success criteria by which governors can hold leaders to account.

The trust undertook a review of governance, which recommended strengthening the effectiveness of the academy advisory council (AAC), the school's local governance system, whose legal powers are limited. The trust has reconstituted the AAC but this new group has met only once, so it is too soon to judge the impact of this work. The legal powers for governance will remain with the trust board. Through the work of the director of education, secondary, and the trust's education adviser, the standards committee of the trust board now receives high-quality, detailed and accurate reports on the school's progress. These reports have enabled the board to take urgent actions, for example to strengthen the leadership of teaching, learning and assessment. This aspect of governance is therefore functioning effectively.

The school has also undertaken a review of its pupil premium spending, which set out recommendations to improve the effectiveness of this funding. The trust secured ongoing support from the Lincolnshire Teaching Schools Alliance to ensure a continued focus on this aspect of its work. There are some promising signs of its impact. For example, the overall attendance of pupils eligible for this funding has improved and, in some areas of the curriculum, they are beginning to achieve better. These improvements are far from wholesale, however, and leaders do not yet have a precise understanding of why some actions are working while others are not. Equally, there is now closer monitoring of the Year 7 literacy and numeracy funding, but it is not always clear why some actions are effective.

While the senior leaders are a united force, some aspects of leadership require further development. Not all of the school's middle leaders are effective in quality assuring the work of their teams. Some staff told inspectors that not all leaders communicate with them effectively and that there is still some lack of clarity in who is responsible for what. Some appointments are new; the literacy leader was appointed recently and so the impact of the work to improve literacy cannot be judged. Other work is still in the development stage, for example training for teachers in how to teach pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Following the section 5 inspection, leaders made some changes to the curriculum. Fewer pupils than previously have been entered for the EBacc qualifications, since leaders judged that this was not appropriate for all pupils and the quality of teaching in these subjects was not good enough to ensure that they achieved well. Further changes are planned for the next academic year.

Despite the instability that the school has been through, and some ongoing difficulties, a sense of hope and optimism is now beginning to take hold. Staff who spoke with inspectors reported that current leaders are building stability, allowing initiatives time to become established before introducing new ones. The behaviour of pupils is beginning to improve. The actions taken by a succession of leaders since the previous inspection have not been effective, but under the current leadership promising signs of a better future for the school are emerging.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been minimal. Teachers do not use assessment information routinely to plan learning that meets pupils' needs effectively. It continues to be the case that the most able pupils are not stretched by their learning, while the least able are not supported effectively. The school employs many teaching assistants, but in some classes it is not clear what impact they are having.

Teachers' expectations remain too low, both for pupils' behaviour and the quality of their work. Too few pupils take pride in their work and present it well. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said they found many lessons boring, due to the lack of

appropriate challenge. Pupils who are aiming at good passes in their GCSE examinations do not always have a clear understanding of how to achieve their target grade. In some cases, those who spoke with inspectors did not know what their target grade was.

Teachers do not do enough to impose their authority on their classes, with the consequence that many lessons continue to be interrupted by poor behaviour and the start and finish of lessons are sometimes disorderly. The school's turbulence has left some staff feeling demoralised, and relationships between staff and pupils are not consistently good. Not all staff model the school's values well or use opportunities such as tutor time to build a rapport with their classes. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said they would like to feel more connected to their teachers.

In many subjects, teachers are not doing enough to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy. Pupils do not use dictionaries to check their spelling, for example, or know the 'key words' for particular topics. Teachers do not correct pupils' spelling and grammar consistently, or provide models of how to structure an answer effectively. With the exception of Year 7, there are too few opportunities for pupils to read in class.

Despite these weaknesses, the school has pockets of strong practice. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher ensured that pupils knew how to be successful in their work and how to help themselves without relying on the teacher's support. In a GCSE art lesson, the teacher had defined the learning objectives according to pupils' targets and as a result pupils knew exactly what they had to do. In all of the better sessions seen by inspectors, teachers' high expectations, effective planning and high-quality feedback were routine and pupils responded accordingly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school's new behaviour policy is leading to some improvements in pupils' behaviour. There are fewer serious breaches of the behaviour code and fewer incidents of pupils being removed from class. However, these improvements have not been rapid enough and are far from comprehensive. Almost all pupils who spoke with inspectors said that the poor behaviour of some pupils continues to disrupt their learning. Not all staff apply the behaviour policy consistently, with the result that pupils receive mixed messages about the impact of their behaviour. Staff who spoke with inspectors commented that they do not always know what happens when a pupil is removed from their class and would like greater clarity from leaders about the sanctions imposed.

Behaviour at break and lunchtimes is improving due to better supervision and leaders being visible around the school site. Pupils agreed that there are fewer fights and they generally feel safe at these times. However, inspectors overheard a lot of very poor and disrespectful language which was not challenged sufficiently by

staff. While mostly good humoured, pupils' behaviour in the lunch queues and on the playground is sometimes overly boisterous.

The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school on a fixed-term basis has reduced, but remains too high. Too many of the pupils who are excluded come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The overall attendance of pupils has risen compared to last year. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEN and/or disabilities who are persistently absent from school remains shockingly high; over a third of these pupils do not attend school regularly.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors said they would like more 'learning about life'. Not all year groups have lessons in personal, social, health and economic education or adequate sex and relationships education. Some told inspectors they would like to know more about staying safe in relationships, for example, and how to manage money effectively. Again, there are pockets of good practice. The Year 9 pupils who spoke with an inspector showed good awareness of different cultures and the importance of respecting people in same-sex relationships. The culture of respect is not fully embedded across the school, however.

The school has had some successes in this area of its work. Since the previous inspection, leaders have been successful in gaining the coveted Careers Mark, testament to their effective work to ensure that pupils are well informed about the opportunities open to them.

Despite the inconsistencies in its application, there are promising signs that the new rewards system is encouraging improvements to behaviour. Younger pupils in particular wear their badges with pride. During the inspection, Year 7 were observed behaving excellently in an assembly, which reinforced important values such as resilience and ambition. The effective management of the assembly meant that pupils listened with respect and awe, pausing for a moment to reflect in complete silence on the meaning of the assembly.

Outcomes for pupils

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not improving quickly enough to ensure that pupils make good progress across all areas of their learning. While leaders cautiously expect some modest improvements to pupils' outcomes at key stage 4, these will come about largely as a result of intensive intervention and support for these pupils, and not as a result of improving teaching.

The most able pupils continue to underachieve significantly, because teaching does not meet their needs well enough. Leaders have plans in place to improve the teaching for pupils with SEN and disability, but these have not yet been fulfilled. Consequently, these pupils are not making the progress they should. The use of the Year 7 catch-up literacy and numeracy fund is not fully effective. There are improvements to pupils' reading ages, but not to their skills in numeracy.

Current school information suggests that there are ongoing disparities in how well pupils achieve in different subjects. Pupils' progress in English is slower than that in mathematics, for example, while achievement in humanities and in modern foreign languages is not improving quickly enough. Leaders have taken action to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments; for example, there are opportunities for teachers to meet with colleagues from other schools to check that they are assessing work correctly. A new system is in use to set assessments and track pupils' progress, but it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of this system. Despite the improvements to assessment, leaders acknowledge that attainment is likely to remain low across a range of subjects at key stage 4, and progress will remain uneven.

External support

Leaders have made links with local schools through involvement in a Transforming Schools Pilot Project, orchestrated by the Department for Education. These links are proving useful in giving leaders an insight into effective practice in schools in similar contexts. Since the school remains geographically isolated from other schools in the trust, the importance of such links is paramount. In addition to the deployment of its own staff, the trust has contracted the services of an external consultant to support leaders in the school. The school also makes use of a consultant to check the effectiveness of the school's actions to improve. This support has been effective in enabling trust leaders to have an accurate view of the quality of provision.

Leaders and governors should take further action to:

- ensure that the school's action plan contains regular milestones and success criteria, so that governors can fully hold leaders to account for its implementation.