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7 December 2015

Ms Marianne Gentilli
Principal
The Littlehampton Academy
Fitzalan Road
Littlehampton
West Sussex
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Dear Ms Gentilli

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Littlehampton Academy

Following my visit with Helena Read and Seamus Murphy, Her Majesty's Inspectors, and Hugh Betterton and Peter Rodin, Ofsted Inspectors, to your academy on 25 and 26 November 2015, 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 which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The academy is not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The academy may appoint newly qualified teachers in subjects other than science.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Improve teaching in order to raise achievement by ensuring teachers:
 - accurately assess students' progress and plan work that reflects their previous progress and attainment
 - provide challenging work for all students, especially the more-able, those of middle ability and those supported through pupil premium funds
 - improve students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy by providing frequent opportunities to reinforce literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
 - insist that students take greater care with the presentation of their work so that they can refer to it when they revise for examinations.

- Ensure that senior leaders and, in particular, the Principal:
 - provide clear direction for the academy's work by concentrating on how to bring about rapid improvements in teaching and achievement
 - accurately evaluate the quality of teaching by focusing on how well students learn so that feedback and training for teachers are clearly directed at improving the progress made by students
 - make arrangements for all subject leaders to receive training to help them develop effective teaching in their subjects
 - work closely with parents to address their concerns about the quality of education provide for their children.

- Improve the effectiveness of the academy council by making sure members understand how to discharge their responsibilities for holding the Principal and other key staff to account for the academy's performance.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised a wide range of documents including the academy's single central record of staff vetting checks. Inspectors met with the Principal, members of the senior team and middle leaders. Discussions were held with the Chair of the Academy Council and several other councillors. In addition, inspectors met with groups of pupils from all year groups and talked to pupils informally during break- and lunchtime. Inspectors reviewed 189 parental responses overall and 118 in the last year on the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and analysed 105 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors made more than 45 visits to lessons, several of which were accompanied by senior leaders. Inspectors met with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Woodard Academies Trust and a telephone call was held with the headteacher of St Paul's Catholic School, which currently offers support to The Littlehampton Academy.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, 24 teachers have left the academy and 26 new teachers have joined. This includes five newly qualified teachers and 11 long-term supply teachers. The new academy council took up its position in September 2015 and has had two meetings this term.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils in the summer 2015 GCSE examinations showed improvement in some subjects, including mathematics, but declined in several areas, including the progress made by pupils in English. Disadvantaged pupils made very poor progress in English and mathematics, well below that of other pupils nationally. Just over one in 10 disadvantaged pupils gained five or more GCSE grades at C or above in 2015. Fewer of the most-able pupils made good or expected progress in English and mathematics than in the previous year. Pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs made much less progress than other pupils in the 2015 examinations. Outcomes matched the academy's predictions more closely in English and mathematics. Although predictions were more accurate across the board, the match with outcomes was much more variable in other subjects. Senior leaders recognise that there is more to do to make sure that all assessment is accurate.

In 2014/15, the academy's pupil premium funding was used to address whole-school underachievement through additional staffing for some groups and a range of targeted support for disadvantaged pupils. For last year's Year 11 disadvantaged pupils, additional help was inadequate; it was 'too little, too late', as described by the academy.

Since September 2015, the academy has put in place more targeted provision for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in English, mathematics and literacy. Additional staffing is also in place. As a result, there are some signs of better achievement for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in Years 8 and 11. Work in pupils' books shows higher levels of challenge and expectation.

Pupils' progress is tracked well through the whole-school system. However, the academy has not yet moved forward quickly enough since the last inspection to identify the precise learning needs of individual disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders recognise the need to do this more robustly to ensure rapid progress for all disadvantaged pupils. Leaders' planning does not address sharply enough how funding is precisely directed at meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils or what difference it makes. Senior leaders now recognise that they need to measure the achievement of disadvantaged pupils against that of other pupils nationally to make sure that aspirations are high enough.

Support offered to the most-able disadvantaged pupils has not shown enough impact since the last inspection. In addition, senior leaders are aware that Year 9 disadvantaged pupils have received very little additional help. As a result, they are not catching up with other pupils.

The academy is setting more ambitious targets for the most-able pupils. Subject leaders in mathematics and English are confident of better outcomes for Year 11 pupils overall, and this was reflected in work seen by inspectors in books and in lessons. Projections are encouraging, but leaders expressed less confidence that the achievement of the most-able pupils will rise as quickly as it should.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The pace of improvement in teaching has undoubtedly been hindered by the ongoing and very high levels of staff turnover in the academy. Despite this, senior leaders are continuing with the academy's focused programme of training and development for staff, and there is evidence that work with some individual teachers is having a positive impact. Because of this, the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers other than in science.

Inspectors saw evidence of teachers' increasingly high expectations, particularly in English, mathematics and history, and of better questioning, which is helping pupils to think and learn more deeply. However, this is still too variable across and within subjects, and teaching in science remains weak. The academy's system of marking and feedback is now used effectively by most teachers. Pupils feel that this has really helped them to understand how to improve their work. Books show that pupils are making much better progress when teachers' comments question and challenge them. Nevertheless, improvements in teaching have not yet resulted in the necessary rapid improvement in pupils' progress.

The most-able pupils report that they feel work has got harder and that they are usually offered additional, more stretching tasks in lessons. However, these are often left to choice so not all pupils complete them. Inspectors saw little evidence of teachers offering different rather than extra learning tasks to more-able pupils. Sometimes, interesting and more demanding learning opportunities are missed in lessons because teachers do not have the confidence to move away from their lesson plan. Because of this, the most-able pupils are not yet making enough progress. The Principal described the introduction of more 'sophisticated' teacher training and development this term to address this issue.

A third of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire this year had concerns about the quality of teaching.

Teaching in the sixth form is strong. Inspectors saw knowledgeable and skilled teachers provoking intelligent debate and deep thinking from learners. This is reflected in the good progress that learners are making.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The pupils at The Littlehampton Academy are its strength. Polite, open-minded and welcoming, they are eager to learn and very loyal to their academy. The academy has continued to work very effectively since the last inspection to develop the growing culture of positive behaviour. Pupils told inspectors that they recognised improvements in behaviour across the academy, but reported that there were still pockets of misbehaviour in some lessons, often with temporary teachers. Bullying is dealt with robustly if it occurs. Pupils reflected on an ethos of tolerance and acceptance towards those from a different background.

Good opportunities are provided for the development of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural values. Inspectors saw a well-managed and pupil-led assembly on charity work.

Well-focused initiatives have resulted in significant improvements in attendance for all groups of pupils since the last inspection, and particularly for disadvantaged pupils. For example, the academy uses a minibus to collect pupils who are poor attenders and has worked effectively with parents. The academy's rewards system is working well to improve pupil lateness, which has reduced by over a quarter. Similarly, external, internal and permanent exclusion rates have reduced substantially, including for disadvantaged pupils.

The school implements robust safeguarding procedures. Staff training is effective and more vulnerable pupils are well supported. Leaders are diligent in their liaison with other agencies when this is required.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior and middle leaders have effected ongoing steady improvement in several key aspects. However, academy leaders have failed to drive sufficiently rapid improvement in several crucial areas, most importantly the lack of progress made by disadvantaged and more-able pupils. Too many pupils are still not making the progress they should be from starting points that are only just below the national average. As a result, progress toward the removal of special measures is not rapid enough.

Middle leaders are committed and several are confident about securing improvement in their subject areas. However, some expressed a lack of confidence in the leadership of the academy.

Of those parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire during the inspection, almost a third expressed concerns about the academy's leadership and a third would not recommend the academy to other parents. A significant proportion feel that their children are not well taught and do not make good progress. Although these responses are more positive than in the previous year, they do not yet show the robust and collective support for the academy that would help to drive rapid improvement. The academy has not sought the collective views of all parents since January 2014. Well over a third of academy staff, at all levels, who responded to the Ofsted staff questionnaire were not confident in the academy's leadership, and some highlighted more detailed concerns. The robust approach to underperformance of teachers highlighted in the last inspection has not, since then, been well enough underpinned by the building of positive and productive relationships with staff. These issues limit the capacity of the academy to move swiftly towards the removal of special measures.

The new academy council has met only twice since its inception in September 2015. Despite this, the new Chair has an astute and perceptive view of standards in the academy and is robust in his determination to ensure rapid progress. He is aware that the academy council lacks specific expertise in secondary education and is seeking assiduously to rectify this.

External support

Support for the academy from the Woodard Academies Trust has not shown sufficient impact on improvement since the last inspection. Trust leaders have neither recognised that the pace of improvement has been too slow nor identified dissatisfaction and concerns from parents and staff. The trust's analysis of the academy's progress information is limited and does not include that for pupils in Key Stage 3. The trust is not able to account for the appropriate and effective use of pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils in last year's Year 11, or for other current year groups, for example Year 9. As a result, outcomes are not improving quickly or steeply enough; this is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils, the

most-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Middle leaders report that support for them put in place by Woodard Academies Trust this term has felt judgmental rather than developmental and has had limited impact. At present, an interim CEO is in place from May 2015. Some more effective support for new academy councillors has been put in place recently. A new substantive CEO will join the Woodard Academies Trust in January 2016.

The Littlehampton Academy has received funded support from St Paul's Catholic School and this will continue this year. A deputy headteacher from St Paul's and an assistant headteacher from Lancing College have recently been co-opted to the academy council standards and safeguarding sub-committee. They will offer secondary expertise, guidance and support. The academy also works with St Philip Howard Catholic School and Sir Robert Woodard Academy. Leaders have made effective use of 'excellence visits' to Shoreham Academy.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Leaders should analyse the concerns of staff and parents urgently to ensure that they are addressed through better communication and a more collaborative approach.
- Leaders must clarify and simplify the academy's strategies for improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils and the most-able pupils so that they have better and more rapid impact.