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Mrs T Graham
Principal
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Milton Lane
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Dear Mrs Graham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Dartmouth Academy

Following my visit with Paul Smith, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 5 and 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 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.

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 interim advisory committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils' outcomes by taking rigorous and rapid action to drive up achievement:
 - for disadvantaged pupils across the academy
 - for boys, so that their progress and attainment matches that of girls by the end of Key Stage 4
 - in mathematics, particularly in pupils' use and understanding of number in the primary phase
 - in the sixth form, so that pupils complete their courses successfully
 - in the primary phase, so that pupils have the skills they need to thrive in the secondary phase
 - across all subjects in the secondary phase, so that inconsistencies are eliminated and pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and more is outstanding by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations, including of how pupils present and complete their work
 - identifying the needs of disadvantaged pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
 - ensuring that teachers check pupils' understanding, put right misconceptions and move learning on more quickly
 - placing a relentless focus on developing pupils' literacy skills
 - ensuring the accuracy and reliability of assessment information, including in the sixth form, and making sure that teachers use this to challenge all groups of pupils in every lesson.
- Improve pupils' behaviour so that, in every lesson, pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress.
- Urgently improve the procedures for recording the use of restraint. Make sure that leaders use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of support for pupils and reduce the use of restraint over time.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management, and governance, by:
 - implementing a sharply focused action plan to address the academy's weaknesses, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken
 - clarifying the long-term future of the sixth form provision
 - developing an academy-wide strategy for improving pupils' literacy skills
 - ensuring a rigorous approach to checking the quality of teaching and responding rapidly to weaknesses identified
 - tracking carefully patterns in the achievement, attendance and behaviour of

different groups of pupils across the academy, and taking swift and effective action in response

- ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make better progress, particularly in the secondary phase
- making sure that governors play a full and effective part in challenging academy leaders to bring about rapid improvement.

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

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 October 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of the interim advisory committee (IAC) and the chief executive officer of Academies South West multi-academy trust. As reported in the first monitoring inspection visit, the sixth form has been temporarily closed. Areas for improvement relating to this phase have, therefore, not been monitored during this second monitoring inspection.

Context

New leaders for mathematics and science have now taken up their posts. There are no further changes to the academy's context since the first monitoring visit in June 2016.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal is developing successfully a culture of high aspirations and expectations across this small academy for pupils aged three to 16 years. She is engaging staff, pupils, parents and the IAC effectively in this. She is also involving other local primary schools with pupils who go on to attend the secondary phase of the academy. Teachers are beginning to share expertise across the phases in order to promote progression and continuity for the pupils. Pupils now aspire to reach more challenging targets. The impact is seen in the GCSE results for 2016, which were the best the academy has achieved.

Clear lines of accountability have been established. The IAC holds senior leaders to account appropriately for the standards pupils achieve. This includes the disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for support from the pupil premium or service premium. As a result of this, and the external review of the academy's use of the funding, disadvantaged pupils made better progress in 2016 than in the previous year by the end of key stage 4. There is as yet no published information available to compare how the pupils fared against other pupils nationally. No evaluation of the progress of disadvantaged pupils in all year groups across the academy was available at the time of the visit.

Senior leaders hold subject leaders and other middle leaders to account appropriately for pupils' academic progress, attendance and behaviour, with increasing success. In turn, middle leaders are beginning to hold teachers to account for their pupils' progress in regular 'raising standards' meetings. Senior and middle leaders are gaining a more accurate view of pupils' outcomes through evaluating pupils' progress information, the work in their books and observing their learning in lessons. They identify appropriate priorities for improvement in subject action plans. This is with a view to gaining greater consistency across subjects and

year groups in the progress of all pupils, including the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This remains a high priority for the academy.

Senior leaders evaluate the academy's improvement plan regularly. The plan includes all the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection, plus a considerable number of other planned actions. However, the IAC ensures that the focus remains on the progress of all pupils throughout the academy.

Leaders and managers rightly ensure that staff focus on improving pupils' literacy skills across subjects, particularly the skills of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The leaders have invested in a reading programme which is beginning to engage pupils, especially boys, in reading more widely and regularly. Teachers encourage pupils to use a greater variety of vocabulary and sentences in their writing, so far with varying success.

A rigorous approach to checking the quality of teaching ensures that weaknesses are identified and eliminated. It also identifies relevant training needs for staff, such as the use of assessment in lessons. Consequently, the quality of teaching is improving, although a few teachers would benefit from professional development that is more bespoke to their specific needs.

Patterns in the achievement, attendance and behaviour of different groups of pupils are tracked carefully across the academy. However, the patterns in behaviour are not evaluated robustly to identify the lessons where further professional development is needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The external review of governance has developed the IAC's skills in gaining an in-depth knowledge of the academy's work and in challenging senior leaders to bring about rapid improvement. Through examining pupils' progress information, monitoring the improvement plan, regular visits to the academy and a range of external and internal reports, the IAC has a good understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement. Its impact can be seen, for example, in ensuring that the information on pupils' progress is increasingly accurate and is used to identify and address areas of underperformance.

Together with the IAC, senior leaders ensure a culture of vigilance with regard to the safeguarding of pupils. They have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records, including those for restraint, are detailed. The records are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the support provided for pupils and to inform improvements. For example, alternative strategies are now being used which have reduced the use of restraint. All staff and governors have up-to-date knowledge and understanding of safeguarding requirements due to regular training, for example, in safeguarding, safer recruitment and in preventing radicalisation and extremism. Relevant staff have been trained in the use of restraint. School policies and procedures are up to date and reviewed regularly.

They are followed consistently by staff. Appropriate action is taken to address any concerns, including working with external agencies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There are clear improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, although variations remain between subjects. The improvements are due to robust management of teachers' performance, relevant staff training and higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Schemes of learning for all year groups in the secondary phase ensure that pupils' work is suitably challenging. As a result, pupils are engaged in their learning. Throughout the academy, positive relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, lead to pupils contributing confidently to their lessons.

Teachers' expectations of how pupils present and complete their work are also higher. For example, in mathematics, pupils are now expected to show how they work out their answers and to form numbers clearly, keeping within the grid lines. This is helping pupils to revise their work.

Underpinning these improvements is a more reliable and accurate approach across the academy to tracking pupils' progress. This helps teachers to know the progress of different pupil groups and to plan to meet their needs. However, new staff do not have the progress tracking information for last year for all their teaching groups to aid them in their lesson planning.

Almost all teachers observed were checking pupils' understanding in lessons, and adapting their strategies to address any misconceptions and deepen learning, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Good examples were seen in an English lesson of the teacher asking probing questions to extend pupils' thinking and responses. Pupils said, and their work confirmed, that this assessment of their learning is helping them to make better progress, and that they feel more confident about attempting new work.

All teachers follow the academy's policy and procedures for providing feedback on pupils' work, including their literacy skills. However, some do not check that pupils' subsequent work demonstrates that they have learned from the feedback. For example, a disadvantaged most-able pupil did not understand how to explain the effects of certain techniques used by an author to engage the reader, although this was taught over a series of English lessons. The fact that he did not understand the vocabulary being used was not picked up by the teacher, who gave similar feedback on each piece of work. Limited vocabulary and inability to explain complex ideas in writing remain a barrier to progress for many of the disadvantaged pupils, including the most able.

The most able pupils overall are responding well to the higher expectations in lessons. Work in their books shows that they are making good progress across all key stages.

Increasingly effective systems are being put in place to provide teachers with strategies to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, work in lessons is not matched well to the pupils' specific needs to enable them to make good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are improving because they are finding the work is appropriately challenging for them in an increasing number of lessons. Teachers' higher expectations and regular feedback and marking show pupils that their work is valued. Behaviour in lessons is mostly good. In a few instances, where the level of challenge is not appropriately matched to pupils' different starting points and the pace of learning is too slow, low-level disruption occurs. Pupils say, and their books confirm, they make least progress in these lessons. Such instances of disruption, however, are diminishing rapidly.

Pupils' conduct around the academy is improving due to a more consistent approach by staff to managing behaviour. Consequently, the academy is a calm, orderly environment. Most pupils are considerate towards other pupils and staff. Pupils with behaviour difficulties are supported appropriately, and they are learning to manage their conduct. The number of exclusions is reducing. Pupils respond well to expectations of health and safety, for example in practical lessons such as science. Attendance is improving and is broadly average. Most pupils are punctual to the academy and to lessons.

Pupils say they feel safe in the academy. They learn how to stay safe, for example from cyberbullying and misuse of social media. They are confident that their tutors would address promptly any concerns they may have. Pupils like the fact that, because it is a small school, their teachers know them well and they know each other. They value the additional time at lunchtime and after school that teachers give to helping them with their work.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress is now more rapid due to improvements in the quality of teaching and the assessment of their work. More rigorous tracking of the progress of individual pupils and groups throughout the academy helps to identify areas of underperformance. However, middle leaders are not yet using the available information well enough to tackle the issues consistently across subjects and year groups.

Children continue to get off to a flying start in the early years, due to effective

teaching and curriculum planning. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development remains above the national average.

Across key stages 1 and 2, pupils make good progress in using phonics to read unfamiliar books. Achievement in the Year 1 phonics check is improving over time, in line with the national figure. This includes the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, although boys make less progress than girls. However, this good start has not been built on, as pupils have not read regularly and widely to develop their comprehension skills. Consequently, they did not meet age-related expectations in the 2016 national tests taken at the end of key stage 2. The recent introduction of an academy-wide reading programme, and specific support in reading for disadvantaged pupils, are beginning to engage more boys in reading. At key stage 3, pupils are also tackling a reading list to experience a wider range of authors and texts. At key stage 4, they now analyse texts in greater depth and this is improving their comprehension.

Throughout the academy, the most able pupils make good progress in writing. Their sentence structure and use of vocabulary become increasingly sophisticated and relevant to the purpose and audience. They organise their writing well, in paragraphs that are appropriately punctuated. Disadvantaged pupils are supported effectively, for example in developing phonics and spelling strategies, and are now making better progress in English lessons across the academy. They are not given enough opportunity to develop their writing, and especially their vocabulary, across subjects. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making enough progress in writing, because their specific needs are not being addressed in lessons.

Previous underachievement in mathematics throughout the academy is being tackled effectively, although improvements are very recent and pupils are not making as rapid progress in this subject as they are in English. By the end of key stage 2, the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged are applying calculations at an appropriate level in solving problems. Some of the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not being supported enough to move beyond simple addition and subtraction. By the end of key stage 4, pupils from all starting points are regaining their confidence in tackling mathematical problems. This is due to an increasingly structured, step-by-step approach that ensures that basic concepts are understood securely. There is not, as yet, an academy-wide calculation policy to promote greater consistency and to increase rates of progress.

Pupils' progress remains uneven across subjects, year groups and pupil groups, although differences are diminishing as teachers make increasingly effective use of progress information. In 2016, the academy exceeded the government's floor standards (the minimum expectations for attainment and progress) at GCSE, with a progress score that was close to the national average; 52% of the pupils attained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. This was a significant improvement on the

results for the previous year. In addition, boys' progress matched that of girls.

External support

High-quality support is provided for the academy by the Academies South West multi-academy trust. For example, senior leaders are being supported effectively by other schools in the trust in tracking and evaluating pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Middle leaders are being supported to develop their skills in monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' progress, in order to promote greater consistency. They are also being supported in moderating teachers' assessments, which is leading to increased accuracy. Schemes of learning have been provided for all teachers in the secondary phase, which are helping to raise their expectations of what the pupils can achieve. The academy is adapting the schemes appropriately to meet the specific needs of its pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

- Refine teachers' use of assessment to identify specifically, in lessons and in feedback on pupils' work, the next steps in learning for individual pupils and groups. Use the various next steps, including in literacy for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to inform lessons.
- Sharpen the skills of senior and middle leaders in evaluating the impact of the academy's work on the progress, attendance and behaviour of pupils across subjects, year groups and pupil groups, to inform further improvements.