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Gerard Batty
Executive Headteacher
Stalham High School
Brumstead Road
Stalham
Norwich
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Dear Mr Batty

Special measures monitoring inspection of Stalham High School

Following my visit with Michael Stanton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 18–19 June 2014, 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. As agreed previously, the school has the leadership capability to support a maximum of two newly qualified teachers.

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, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk local authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Develop effective strategic plans to secure the long-term improvement of the school, including its governance, senior leadership and use of links with outstanding schools by:
 - ensuring that the governing body plans for sustaining the school in the long term
 - working in partnership with the local authority to ensure that the governing body is efficient, effective and fit for purpose
 - conducting a review of how leadership and management is structured in other schools that are both small and very successful
 - entering into effective arrangements with other schools that create efficiencies in terms of finance and the development of expertise
 - developing an approach to school self-evaluation that involves all staff, and welcomes all accurate insight whether positive or critical
 - ensuring that arrangements for checks on new staff always meet statutory requirements.

- Improve teaching by:
 - ensuring all staff set high standards in assessment, marking and planning
 - develop a cohesive school approach to the use of assessment strategies in lessons to check and consolidate learning and to inform pupils about progress in the subject
 - inspiring pupils to raise their own expectations.

- Increase the impact of leaders and managers on teaching by:
 - improving and increasing the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching so that it accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses on a monthly basis
 - sharing best practice through increased peer observation
 - promoting a dialogue about teaching across the staff
 - using performance management to secure development in the school.

- Improve pupils' attitudes to learning and raise expectations of what all students will do in homework, extended written work and attention to detail in writing and completion of their work.

- Develop action plans to address specific weaknesses in achievement for:
 - boys; lower-ability students, including some disabled students and those who have special educational needs; and higher-ability students in science and mathematics.

- Improve daily life in the school for students by:
 - promoting positive attitudes to other ethnic groups and eliminating racist comments
 - ensuring that older students are included in training about racism and bullying
 - improving the school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education across all year groups and subjects

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18–19 June 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, nominated senior and middle leaders, a group of students, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in March, the staffing turbulence has settled somewhat, although long-term teacher absence continues to present difficulties. The school is currently in advanced stages of discussion with an academy sponsor, with plans to convert to academy status at some point during the next academic year. The executive headteacher's tenure finishes at the end of term, and plans are in hand to make an interim appointment for September. The head of science, who holds a senior leadership role, is also leaving shortly to take up a new appointment.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school has rightly focused its energy on securing the best possible results for the students currently in Year 11. To this end, they have been expected to attend lessons right up to the middle of June and have been offered lots of extra revision sessions. Additional support has been well targeted because assessments of students' work and progress have been rigorously collated and analysed so that any underachievement has been quickly spotted. The 'wonder wall' in the staff room, for example, has ensured that teachers see, at a glance, how the impact their work is having on student achievement, and also where key groups have not been making the progress that they should. The net result of all this effort is that standards are predicted to rise this year, with 55% of students expected to gain at least five good GCSEs including English and mathematics. Significantly, more students are on track to make the progress that they should, notably the most-able students. The wide gaps in progress and attainment that were evident last year are narrowing, but there remains too much disparity in achievement. Attainment and progress in mathematics have strengthened, but still lag too far behind English. Students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding, and disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are making better progress, but they still achieve less well than their classmates.

Higher expectations are at the heart of the rise in achievement. The school's more systematic approach to setting targets has helped to increase aspiration; students of all ages know their current level of achievement and the standards they should reach. Nonetheless, in some cases, the targets set for individual students in Key Stage 3 are not ambitious enough, particularly for the most able.

Inspection evidence confirms improvement in the quality of students' learning and acceleration in their progress. This is inevitably most evident where teaching is strong. For example, in English, attainment has improved for disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium, so that the attainment gap between them and other students is closing. However, gaps in the progress of different groups are much wider where teaching is weaker.

The quality of teaching

The school's own monitoring indicates steady improvement in the quality of teaching since the inspection in November. Teaching has been strengthened in a number of ways, but the biggest difference is the higher expectations that teachers now have, both of students' behaviour and of the quality of their work. Short-term planning is more sharply focused on what students should achieve, with teachers making better use of assessment information to set more challenging objectives and tasks in the expectation that students will learn more. Teachers are demonstrating greater confidence to try new approaches and present students with a variety of different activities. Although these do not always work seamlessly, it shows that the school is promoting an open dialogue about teaching and learning – for example, through regular staff briefings and one-to-one coaching – so that staff share ideas and think more constructively about how students might learn most effectively.

Marking is also much better. Teachers work hard to keep up to date, and students like the regular feedback they receive and are generally keen to follow the guidance they are given. Nonetheless, although marking is completed conscientiously, too much still proves ineffective because teachers do not take time or trouble to check that their advice is read, understood or followed. Some teachers do not take care to model writing.

In general, there is a pleasant working environment, with lessons proceeding without interruption. Teachers use their specialist subject knowledge to select interesting resources and set work that is suitably difficult. The best teaching is outstanding because students with different starting points make rapid progress in their learning. Where teaching is most effective, teachers use what they know about students' prior learning, and their potential achievement, to set demanding tasks that do not restrict their learning. The best teaching is also very skilfully managed so that learning is sharply focused and rapid.

Where teaching is less effective, students make patchy progress, but the reasons for this slow or uneven progress are varied. Sometimes, teachers do not plan work with any precision; when learning objectives are meaningless, students are unclear what they are learning or why. Occasionally, teachers' expositions and/or their questioning are poorly considered, so that students do not understand the key concepts being explained, or what they need to do. The best questioning builds the students'

understanding and checks that everyone follows, but this is not always the case, particularly when teachers assume that one correct answer indicates mass comprehension. When the pace of learning slows, students are usually patient, but there are times when their off-task chatter further slows their progress. In some classes, the quality of teaching is sound, but the schemes of work do not cover the subject knowledge, understanding or skills that will enable students to make good progress in their learning, even where teachers' assessments indicate that progress is being made.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school has adopted and embedded a new, simpler form of behaviour management which has improved behaviour. Inspectors did not observe any inadequate behaviour during the visit. Indeed, students were polite, respectful and mature in their interactions with one another and with adults. Students readily assume responsibility; for example, as prefects, reading buddies or as class leaders. Nonetheless, there are indications that behaviour is far from consistently good. Although students were stung by some of the criticisms in the inspection report, they acknowledge that aspects of behaviour needed to improve. For example, low-level disruption, often linked with less effective teaching, was previously accepted as the norm in some classes. Attitudes to learning have improved, but some students still misbehave when the opportunity arises.

During the inspection, students settled quickly at the start of each lesson and sustained their concentration well. They have higher expectations of their own conduct and that of their classmates, and even of their teachers. For example, they are rightly indignant when the quality of teaching, or marking, is not up to scratch, or when teachers fail to set or mark homework or are too often absent.

The school is much more systematic in its collection and interrogation of behaviour information. Rather than turn a 'blind eye' to its existence, students are specifically surveyed on incidents of bullying, including racial or homophobic harassment. Importantly, there is an open dialogue about such matters and students are more confident talking about it. The student questionnaire survey highlights some residual concerns, but it also demonstrates that the school is promoting open culture wherein students recognise that low-level name calling or disrespect are unacceptable.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Over the last six months, the executive headteacher has provided just the right antidote for the school's recovery. He has communicated unambiguous expectations for staff and students, and has established clear lines of accountability so that everyone understands their personal and professional responsibilities. Staff have clear performance targets and procedures for absence, and students understand the behaviour expectations and the consequences for transgression. The headteacher's

'open door' policy is appreciated by staff and students, who are confident that issues they raise will be resolved. Students particularly appreciate that the headteacher is approachable and 'delivers on his commitments'. This openness, underpinned by surveys of student opinion, has brought issues and inconsistencies to light but has also strengthened the culture of the school by raising expectations. Students feel that good provision is an entitlement and appreciate the improvements being made on their behalf.

Leadership roles have been suitably clarified and more equitably distributed. By delegating senior leadership responsibilities, the headteacher has better utilised the skills of senior leaders to steer essential improvements in teaching and learning, in using assessment information, and in improving the management of behaviour. Staff and students point to the changes in the behaviour system as the most important. The stepped sanctions are understood by everyone and are implemented with a greater consistency, with the result that behaviour is much better and the number of repeat offenders is reducing. However, the school's more systematic monitoring has highlighted that certain groups of students are over-represented in the behaviour statistics. This has rightly raised concerns, and has necessitated a re-think on the support for these students.

Subject leaders are developing their roles, with clearer responsibilities and accountability to senior leaders. However, they are not a coherent group with a shared purpose and are not yet driving improvement as they should. There remains wide inconsistency in the quality of teaching, marking and homework. Although there is plentiful information about students' progress, it is not routinely used to review the impact of the school's work or to set ambitious target for different groups. Some middle leaders do not model high-quality teaching and do not effectively guide the work of others.

Sensible steps have been taken to strengthen teaching. Weaker aspects of teaching have been identified, and appropriate support has been provided. There are promising signs of improvement, but this inspection showed that much remains to be done. For example, although teachers are endeavouring to fulfil requirements of marking, too much is ineffective, even though staff are working hard. Similarly, better teaching is not accelerating students' progress where the schemes of work require more fundamental review and revision. It is therefore essential that, when checking the effectiveness of planned actions, leaders evaluate the impact of the changes on the progress made by students, particularly the groups that have underachieved historically.

The IEB has transformed the school's governance. Although only constituted with a few members, the board has fulfilled effectively its strategic leadership responsibilities and also developed its day-to-day monitoring role. The IEB is well informed and has thus been able to hold the headteacher and other senior leaders to account, asking probing questions and seeking additional information when

necessary. Plans for the school's further improvement and transition are carefully considered.

External support

The local authority has fulfilled its commitments as set out in its statement of action. Swift action to replace the governing body and appoint the executive headteacher has steered the school's recovery and immediately addressed many of the issues raised at the inspection. The school has sensibly drawn on the expertise available in other schools, including the executive headteacher's own school, to provide support for individual teachers, to develop whole-school procedures and to strengthen leadership. Good support and guidance from external consultants have strengthened provision in mathematics and science, in particular.