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Amy Webb
Interim Headteacher
Stalham High School
Brumstead Road
Stalham
Norwich
NR12 9DG

Dear Ms Webb

Special measures monitoring inspection of Stalham High School

Following my visit with Ian Starling, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3–4 December 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 third 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.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The lead and team inspectors.

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 are 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
 - developing a cohesive school approach to the use of assessment strategies in lessons to check and consolidate learning and to inform students about progress in the subject
 - inspiring students 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 students' 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 third monitoring inspection on 3–4 December 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim 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 last monitoring inspection in June, there have been a number of staff changes. The interim headteacher took up post in September and interim leadership arrangements are in place for English. The school has employed a consultant headteacher for one day a week and a consultant deputy headteacher for two days each week to bolster senior leadership capacity, following the departure of the executive headteacher at the end of the last academic year. Three other teachers joined the school in September, including the head of science. Staff absence, including some long-term absence, is a continuing challenge.

The IEB has been extended with the appointment of two new members. Plans are proceeding for the school to become a sponsored academy in January 2015 as part of the North Norfolk Academy Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In the most recent CGSE examinations in 2014, 52% of Year 11 students achieved at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics, narrowing the gap with standards nationally. Although a marked increase on 2013, the results were below the school's target and lower than those achieved in 2012. Results in English and mathematics showed notable improvement, with attainment at or above average, and the proportions of students making expected progress in line with national figures. However, apart from information and communication technology (ICT), these increases were not matched by attainment and progress in other subjects, almost all of which performed below national comparators. Underachievement in most other subjects undermined overall performance; results in science and design were particularly poor.

The 2014 results show that the most able students make better progress in mathematics and achieve well in English, but are not sufficiently stretched in other subjects. It is also evident that there remain gaps in the achievement of different groups of students: girls' achievement was again better than that of boys in 2014, and disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs attained less well than their classmates. However, these 'in school' gaps closed appreciably

compared with 2013, particularly in English and mathematics. The school's success in this regard confirms the findings of the last visit, in that students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding, and disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are now making much better progress.

Inspection evidence on this visit largely reflects this variable picture from the summer results. In subjects where teaching is effective, students of all abilities make clear gains in learning and the gaps in achievement between different groups of students are small. Conversely, where teaching is weak, not only do students underachieve, but also there are wide gaps in the learning and progress of different groups.

The quality of teaching

The school has built on the improvements reported previously so that strengths have been consolidated and the most serious weaknesses have been tackled. On the whole, teachers are working hard to sustain the higher expectations of senior leaders, particularly in regard to planning lessons and the time spent on marking work. Regular monitoring by senior leaders highlights improvements in the way teachers ask questions to assess students' understanding and adapt teaching. Observations of teaching during this visit demonstrated that students make good progress when work is challenging and skilfully directed. Students respond to teachers' high expectations and work hard.

Nonetheless, evidence from observations, discussions with staff and students, and scrutiny of students' work indicates that weaknesses persist. The quality of learning is weak when work does not stretch students or the pace of teaching is too slow. This is evident when planned objectives or outcomes are unambitious. Some teachers are preoccupied with students getting better scores or levels, rather than deepening their subject knowledge, their skills or their understanding. In one lesson, for example, students were revisiting work to add missing points identified after an assessment had been marked, without learning more or developing their conceptual understanding of the issue. Teaching is not improving quickly enough where subject leadership is ineffective.

Although improving students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a key priority, staff are not yet doing enough to promote this aspect of learning during lessons or in curriculum planning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are generally well behaved and conduct themselves well as they move around the school and socialise at break and lunch times. They know what is expected of them and follow instructions accordingly. This means that lessons get off to a brisk start and generally proceed without interruption. When teaching is

lively and engaging, students respond enthusiastically and work hard, even when work is difficult. This was evident in Year 7 lessons in music and food technology and in Year 8 physical education and English. Students say that their learning is still disrupted by the behaviour of a small minority of classmates, and this problem is worse when lessons are covered by supply teachers. No disruption was observed during this visit.

However, even though students' behaviour is generally compliant, their attitudes to learning are not yet good enough. Some students lack confidence in their own ability and are reticent to contribute in lessons, or simply disengage because they are afraid that they might look silly in front of their classmates. A few are uncooperative and make their indifference known by speaking out of turn or simply not making any effort. There is still wide variation in the amount and quality of work that students complete, both in lessons and as homework. Too many students produce untidy or careless written work, particularly in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and often disregard the advice they are given in teachers' marking comments.

On a more positive note, students are often patient and sustain their concentration well, even when teaching is slow-paced. Most students are proud of their school and many are keen to play a positive part in making it better. Student-led initiatives such as the Year 11 'Here to Help' scheme and the 'anti-bullying steering group', as well as the student learning council, are creating a more affirmative climate. Students new to the school in Year 7 feel well supported. These initiatives create an open dialogue about important issues and make it much less likely that anti-social behaviour goes unnoticed or unreported. One outcome of this heightened awareness is that the frequency of incidents appears to be greater, when in reality the school is a much more settled and cohesive community than hitherto.

Incidents of unacceptable behaviour still take place, but they are less common and are suitably handled both initially and through follow-up action. The school's recent survey highlighted students' ongoing concerns about low-level disruption in lessons and occasional bullying, but one significant difference from a year ago is that students are now alert to unacceptable behaviour. They are intolerant of the casual use of abusive language, including racist or homophobic language. The interim headteacher's firm stance on behaviour has led to a slight increase in fixed-term exclusions this term compared to the same period last year.

Attendance continues to improve. Overall figures exceeded 95% for the first half of the autumn term, with a significant reduction in the number of students who have been persistently absent.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders, including the members of the IEB, have continued to drive school improvement. They have successfully strengthened teaching, raised achievement

and developed strategic plans to secure the school's long-term development. As a result, the school is very different from this time 12 months ago when it was last inspected. The climate for learning is calm and purposeful, and there are efficient procedures for monitoring and assuring positive behaviour. This improvement reflects the school's higher expectations of staff and students, and the way that most people have responded to these requirements. However, some issues are deep-seated and need more time to address. Results in the summer examinations, although better, show that the quality of provision in too many subjects is not good enough. Not all subject leaders or classroom teachers take enough responsibility for the achievement of all their students. There has been opposition from some staff, for example, over linking teachers' performance management to student progress measures. The entrenched attitudes of some staff are a barrier to more rapid improvement, particularly when curriculum planning decisions are made with a lack of knowledge or imagination.

Since taking up post at the start of term, the interim headteacher has skilfully addressed the challenge of reduced leadership capacity by redistributing and sharpening the roles of senior leaders and increasing the accountability for middle leaders, including subject leaders and pastoral managers. Her ongoing focus on improving teaching and her calm, assured leadership have steered the school well. Some middle leaders have risen to the challenge and are proactive in driving improvement. The coordinator for special educational needs (SENCO), for example, has secured better provision and accelerated progress for students who have specific individual needs.

Strategies for improving teaching are developing well and are having a positive impact on classroom practice. For example, all teachers are expected to contribute to the regular weekly staff briefing sessions so that ideas are shared and good practice filters more widely into teaching. Regular monitoring identifies key strengths and areas that need to improve, and stronger practitioners are increasingly taking a leading role in this regard. Targeted support for weaker teaching has strengthened provision, and senior leaders take a suitably robust stance to challenge teaching that is inadequate or fails to improve.

The Chair of the IEB's expert leadership has enabled board members to provide just the right balance of support and challenge for senior leaders. Collectively the IEB has an enviable level of skill and experience, on which the school has been able to draw. The academy conversion process has been facilitated by co-opting two additional members onto the IEB, so that the transition to academy status is being achieved with a minimum of commotion.

External support

The local authority has reduced its level of support, as planned, but has provided help and guidance on request. The school has continued to 'cherry pick' support

from different places, making effective use of links with good and outstanding schools in the local authority, and utilising the 'Norfolk to Good and Great' programme. Support for the interim headteacher has been very effective, particularly from the consultant headteacher.