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Ms Sian Thomas
The Principal
St Aldhelm's Academy
Herbert Avenue
Poole
BH12 4HS

Dear Ms Thomas

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Aldhelm's Academy

Following my visit with Christine Raeside Her Majesty's Inspector and Mary Hoather Additional Inspector to your school on 12 and 13 May 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014. 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 making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint 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 Regional Schools Commissioner for South-West England, the Chair of the Academy Advisory Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Poole.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the sixth form, so that students make at least good progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of all students and set challenging targets for the progress students should make, especially in English, mathematics and science
 - disabled students and those with special educational needs, those who are at risk of underachieving and the most able are provided with effective support and challenge, including through homework
 - teachers' marking and feedback consistently enables students to improve the quality of their work
 - accurate assessment information is used well across all year groups to plan work that matches the learning needs of different groups of students
 - teaching focuses closely on raising standards of literacy and developing mathematical skills
 - the arrangements for teaching classes in the open plan areas are improved.
- Raise students' achievement throughout the academy, particularly in English, mathematics and science, so that standards are at least in line with national averages by:
 - rigorously checking that all students are making at least expected rates of progress, especially students supported through the pupil premium, disabled students, those who have special educational needs and the most able
 - ensuring that all additional adults helping students in lessons support learning effectively.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - increasing the rigour with which leaders, including those responsible for subjects, check on the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that judgements on the quality of teaching are linked closely to students' achievement and take account of the most up-to-date information on students' progress
 - implementing a robust, structured programme of support for individual teachers to enable them to improve the quality of their teaching
 - ensuring leaders at all levels understand their roles and responsibilities and are accountable for their actions
 - ensuring that the curriculum is fit-for-purpose so that all students can achieve well, including in the sixth form.
- Improve students' behaviour by:
 - setting clear expectations for students' behaviour and conduct, and ensuring that all staff consistently follow the academy's behaviour management policy
 - ensuring that all students engage fully in learning in lessons

- reducing the number of students who are temporarily excluded from learning.
- Improve sixth-form provision by:
 - providing well-planned and well managed individual study programmes
 - securing effective contribution of partners and employers in the arrangements for future employability
 - ensuring that all sixth-form students are placed on courses that match their levels of ability.
- Improve the attendance of those students who do not attend regularly.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 May 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, Vice Principals, the Chief Executive Officer of the Ambitions Academy Trust and groups of students. A telephone conversation was held with the Regional Schools Commissioner for the South-West. Inspectors observed 26 lessons, the majority jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also conducted short visits to lessons and scrutinised the quality of work, marking and feedback in students' books. The focus of this inspection was on the quality of teaching, students' behaviour and safety, and leadership and management. The quality of the sixth form was not inspected during this visit.

Context

Since the previous full inspection in October 2014, there have been numerous changes to the senior leadership at the academy. Shortly after my last visit in February 2015, the senior leaders in post at that time all left the academy. The Regional Schools Commissioner brokered support for the academy from the Ambitions Academy Trust. The Ambitions Academy Trust will take over the sponsorship of the academy from 1 June 2015. The trust has recently made three permanent appointments to the posts of Principal and two Vice Principals. From 1 June, the governance of the academy will be through an advisory committee and an academy board. The advisory committee will monitor the academy's progress towards meeting the targets set for its improvement. The academy board will be responsible for the strategic running of this academy and other academies within the trust.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since their arrival, the new Principal and senior leaders have focused relentlessly on improving students' behaviour across the academy. They have been effective in rapidly restoring order to the academy on a day-to-day basis. They have gained the confidence and trust of staff and students. One student commented, 'They have done everything they said they would do so far.' Leaders communicate a clear passion and determination to improve all aspects of the academy's work and to enable students to achieve to their full potential.

Nonetheless, the failure of previous leaders to tackle the academy's significant weaknesses, outlined in my letter of February 2015, has left the current team with an enormous amount of ground to make up. Consequently, the academy has not yet made enough progress towards the removal of special measures within the expected timescale.

Having established a more ordered learning environment, leaders are now appropriately focused on the quality of teaching and learning. They have a clear

understanding of the weaknesses of teachers' practice and the urgent improvements needed to secure better learning for all students. Senior leaders understand the need to focus keenly on the link between what teachers do and the impact this has on students' progress. Teaching across the academy remains inadequate.

Not all middle leaders are making an effective contribution to improving teaching. They do not monitor the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their departments. Students have a very mixed and confused understanding of how they are doing in different subjects; they told inspectors that they want clearer guidance about how to improve their work, and to be stretched and challenged more. However, there is no common approach amongst academy leaders to the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, partly because there is, as yet, no academy-wide improvement plan in place. The absence of targets and timescales to bring about rapid improvement in key aspects of the academy's work is an obstacle to progress. Leaders accept this and acknowledge the need to ensure that these are in place quickly. I will scrutinise the quality and impact of improvement planning at my next visit.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement at the academy remains inadequate. Students are not making enough progress across all year groups and subjects. The work in students' books shows very little evidence of any progress. The level of demand varies significantly from one subject to the next and is almost never high enough. Students report that they underperform in tests against their targets because they are not well prepared. 'We are capable of meeting our targets, but they need to give us harder work.'

Academy leaders have, however, provided urgent and substantial support for Year 11 students to improve their performance before they take their examinations this year. Year 11 students acknowledge and appreciate this. They commented that they know the academy has prioritised them. This rapid support is enabling Year 11 students to improve their performance, but they are still at risk of underachieving because they have significant ground to cover to make up for lost time.

The academy does not have a clear understanding of students' achievement as teachers' tracking of progress is unreliable. Leaders are implementing target-setting processes to ensure students are set achievable, but aspirational, targets. They agree that a more rigorous monitoring cycle is required to enable leaders to gain a much clearer understanding of each student's progress.

I will scrutinise information on students' achievement, as well as how effectively leaders at all levels use this to improve teaching and accelerate progress, during my next visit.

The quality of teaching

Inadequate teaching is endemic across the academy. Leaders acknowledge that their initial focus has been on improving students' behaviour, but that improving the quality of teaching is an urgent priority. The academy has suffered from significant staff absence and has been heavily reliant on supply teachers to cover classes. Leaders have re-arranged the curriculum to ensure students receive more consistent teaching and to reduce the need for excessive supply teachers. Students commented that they understand the need for some supply staff as leaders will now only employ high quality teachers.

Teachers' planning fails to take account of what students already know. Consequently, their expectations of what students can achieve are too low; students know that they are capable of much more. The most able students are not sufficiently challenged, which limits the progress they are able to make; less able students do not always get the help they need. This results in many of them being unable to access the learning planned. Too often, students spend too long on mundane activities which are designed to 'contain' them and their behaviour. As a result, some students become bored, wander off task and misbehave.

While students have responded positively to new leaders' expectations and determination to bring about improvements at the academy, teachers have not. Teachers fail to inspire and motivate students to want to learn. Too many teachers fail to follow the academy's feedback and marking policy. As a result, students are unaware of their targets, their current working level or what they need to do to improve further.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Leaders have taken decisive action to address the unacceptable, highly disruptive behaviour evident in the academy when they took over. They have implemented policies and procedures to improve behaviour, which are clearly understood by students; order has been restored at the academy. Students acknowledge that behaviour has improved significantly and they feel safe. The proportion of students who are excluded from the academy is now very low. Nonetheless, there is still widespread evidence of negative attitudes to learning, which escalate to disruptive behaviour where it is not well managed. This is often as a result of poor teaching, lack of challenge, or inconsistent approaches to behaviour management by teachers.

Students speak favourably of the new reward system and understand how positive attitudes to learning and good conduct around the academy can contribute to rewards. Parents are now more fully informed about students' behaviour and also their achievements.

External support

The academy receives significant support from within the Ambitions Academy Trust, including through its Teaching School status. This support has been effective in tackling the previously very poor behaviour of students. Further support is planned

to develop the quality of teaching across the academy, supported by a partnership with Ringwood School.

Leaders should take further action to:

- urgently implement clear improvement plans, with regular targets and appropriate timescales, to ensure that the progress the academy is making is rapid and can be closely monitored
- conduct an in-depth analysis of students' progress in all year groups and subjects and use this to establish higher expectations of what students can and should achieve
- urgently monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching across the academy.