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9 July 2015

Penny Bignell  
Headteacher  
Sewell Park College  
St Clement's Hill  
Norwich  
NR3 4BX

Dear Mrs Bignell

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Sewell Park College**

Following my visit with Tim McGuire, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 July 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 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 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 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**

cc. Chair of appropriate authority for Sewell Park College

cc. Sheila Lock Interim Director of Children's Services

cc. Department for Education [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2015.**

- Act urgently to raise standards so that:
  - the proportions of both boys and girls making and exceeding expected progress match national levels
  - attainment gaps between disadvantaged and other students are closed
  - attainment in the sixth form improves in 'A' and 'AS' level qualifications
  - students' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics improve.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
  - have high expectations of what students can achieve
  - are able to assess students' work accurately
  - provide more-able students with challenging work and tasks
  - monitor how well students are learning in lessons
  - challenge students when attitudes to learning are not good
  - give students good quality feedback about their work
  - insist on good standards of presentation in students' work.
- Improve leadership so that:
  - leaders at all levels monitor and evaluate the impact of all improvement strategies
  - sixth form and subject leaders hold teachers to account for the quality of learning in their classrooms
  - the progress of individual students, including those in the sixth form, is more effectively tracked and checked
  - support for disadvantaged students is more effective in raising standards for this group
  - transition from primary schools ensures that students get off to a good start in Year 7.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 July 2015.**

### **Evidence**

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

### **Context**

Plans are in place for the school to become a sponsor academy on 1 September, as part of the right for success Academy Trust. The interim headteacher left the school at the end of March, after two terms in charge, and the Principal designate for the academy took up post as headteacher in April. Twenty-two staff are leaving at the end of term. The academy has not recruited students into Year 12, because the sixth form will close at the end of the next academic year.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Progress and achievement are improving across the school although, understandably, a disproportionate effort has been invested in raising standards for students in Year 11, with a well-coordinated campaign of additional support and intervention. Teachers' current assessments indicate that standards at Key Stage 4 are rising and that results will increase this year to meet the government's floor standard. This improvement is based on students in Year 11 making accelerated progress, particularly in English and mathematics. Importantly, the progress made by disadvantaged students this year has not lagged as far behind as it has in previous years, so that gaps in their attainment are narrowing to almost half last year's figure. The school is also predicting a small increase in the proportion of higher grade GCSEs at A\* and A. Sixth-form achievement is also set to rise markedly, with students making significantly better progress this year, particularly in Year 12. The school expects much higher results in this summer's examination results in terms of 'pass rates' and higher grade A and AS levels.

Much of this improved achievement is due to more reliable assessment and the better use of data by teachers and leaders at all levels. This has ensured that students know their targets and whether or not they are on course to achieve them. These targets are based on the school's higher expectation that all students will make at least four levels of progress between the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. This alone has helped to raise aspirations, especially as the information is posted on the front of students' books and is also shared with Key Stage 4 students when they are shown their position on the 'progress wall' in the headteacher's office. In general, students know how well they are doing, but this is not always the case. Some students, including sixth-form students, are unclear about their targets,

whether or not they are on track and what they must do to achieve their target grade.

Evidence from lesson observations, discussions with students and reviews of their work indicate the extent of the improvements in students' learning and progress, but also highlight lots of gaps in students' learning. Despite the likelihood of improved achievement this year, leaders recognise that students' achievement is not good enough.

### **The quality of teaching**

The school's systematic approach to the monitoring of teaching quality, involving routine lesson observations and regular 'climate walks', indicates that teaching has improved since the last inspection. Inspectors observed good learning and progress in several lessons, including some subjects where achievement has not been good enough in the recent past. However, teaching remains too variable, and students' better progress is still overly reliant on additional intervention and support, rather than a diet of high quality teaching.

The recent introduction of 'Sewell Park Essentials' has set out higher expectations for planning, the quality of students' presentation of their work, the use of assessment and the promotion of positive attitudes and behaviour. Evidence from observations on this visit show that teachers are setting more challenging outcomes for each lesson, but that this ambition is not always matched by the quality of learning. Lessons often get off to a slow start, for example when teachers spend too long giving out work or explaining tasks when students could be doing it for themselves. Protracted questioning does not encourage students' engagement. Students do not always work with sufficient urgency in lessons, including the most-able students and those in the sixth form, and this means that students do not always do enough in the time available.

One aspect of the school's work that is showing positive improvement is the use of marking and assessment. Teachers' comments are more sharply focused on specific strengths and priorities for improvement. Where students are responding to this guidance by correcting and editing their work, their better progress is immediately evident.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour and safety were not identified as concerns at the last inspection. During this visit, students conducted themselves well. Settled behaviour was seen in lessons, in assembly and at break and lunch times. Students followed instructions and worked steadily, and their positive attitudes were reflected in the care and attention that most show when completing their work, and taking care with their presentation. However, teachers do not yet expect enough of their classes and, too

often, students can get away with not working hard. Students who lack confidence or inclination can often sit through lessons without exerting themselves.

Students say that the school has been stricter this year, and accept that this is a positive development. The behaviour management system is understood by staff and students, and is largely effective in maintaining a positive climate for learning in lessons. However, students say that lessons are still occasionally disrupted. When students are removed from lessons, they do not complete work that is worthwhile and this is detrimental to their learning and progress.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The strong IEB has skilfully steered the school's recovery by making key strategic decisions about the school's immediate future. It has taken an operational lead in implementing necessary staff changes, including restructuring of senior and middle leadership and rationalising staff roles and responsibilities. The appointment of an interim headteacher laid the essential foundations of the school's recovery. Since April, the new headteacher has been able to focus on strengthening the quality of teaching and learning, and developing systems for monitoring provision so that improvements can be made based on careful evaluation. Confidence in the school's leadership is reflected in the much more positive views expressed by parents and students. The large number of responses collated at parents' evenings this term shows much higher levels of satisfaction than the online survey at the time of the inspection. A much larger proportion of parents would now recommend the school than did in October 2014.

The urgent need to raise standards has ensured that leaders at all levels, including in the sixth form, are monitoring teaching quality more effectively, focus appropriately on the progress and outcomes of different groups, and are alert to evidence of underachievement. Central to this has been the sharing of more reliable assessment data so that staff can see where their efforts are having most impact and where gaps need to be plugged. Subject leaders appreciate having this information at their fingertips, and have benefitted from high-quality training in monitoring the work of their departments. The regular 'climate walks' by senior leaders show that teaching is improving, and also help to quickly pinpoint issues and identify good practice that can be disseminated. Staff are beginning to respond to this by regularly sharing ideas in staff briefings, and by developing a more open and celebratory culture.

Some shortcomings in sixth-form leadership have been addressed by strengthening day-to-day management. This has ensured that students are more conscientious, for example in their attendance and use of private study time. However, evaluation of sixth-form provision is not robust enough.

The school has taken suitable steps to strengthen Year 6/7 transition arrangements, including closer liaison with cluster schools, a planned summer school for pupil premium pupils, and exchange of curriculum information with primary partners. The purpose of this work is to raise expectations when students start in September.

Plans for conversion to academy status are being implemented smoothly, and do not appear to give students cause for anxiety. Suitable assurances are in place to make provision for students who choose to stay on in Year 13 next year.

### **External support**

The local authority's robust challenge to school leaders over the last 18 months has engineered the school's transformation. By issuing a performance standards and safety warning notice, the local authority was able to replace the governing body, bring in new leadership and accelerate the changes that needed to take place. Since the school was placed in special measures, the local authority has provided excellent support for the school's leadership and management, primarily through the IEB: support and guidance from human resources has enabled the school to manage effectively the restructuring of staffing and implement redundancies linked to staff cuts; senior and middle leadership training has been excellent; and financial support has enabled the changes to happen quickly.

Links with an outstanding local school have been helpful in steering and validating school improvement, for example in moderating assessment judgements and providing specialist support for curriculum development and internal reviews.