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Ms Jane Bailey
Principal
South Shore Academy
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Lancashire
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Dear Ms Bailey

Special measures monitoring inspection of South Shore Academy

Following my visit with Bernard Robinson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 30 and 31 March 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

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

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Blackpool Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that all students' behaviour is at least good and that they are safe by:
 - improving their attendance and punctuality to school and eradicating truancy from lessons
 - making certain that procedures for checking the implementation of safeguarding policies and strategies are robust
 - encouraging students to have more respect for themselves and each other through a tailored programme of personal, social and health education that includes more information on how to stay safe online and challenges bullying and discrimination such as homophobia and racism.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good, and therefore significantly improve progress and raise attainment in all subjects and year groups by:
 - ensuring teachers' assessments of students' progress and attainment are consistently accurate
 - increasing the level of challenge in lessons for students at all ability levels so that they make much faster progress
 - ensuring all teachers consistently let students know how well they have done and how to improve
 - making certain that all teachers have high expectations of the presentation of work and the care that students should take over their books, as well as in the tasks they undertake
 - ensuring no student is disadvantaged by preparing tasks to support all students, so that even those who have been absent are able to fully participate in learning
 - eradicating low level disruption by improving the rigour of application of the academy's behaviour policy in lessons and around the school.

- Rapidly improve the impact of leadership at all levels, including that of the trust and governors, so that the pace of improvement accelerates quickly by ensuring that:
 - all staff are held to account for the progress of the students in their lessons
 - systems for managing information on students' progress are refined so that leaders have accurate and useful information, which enables their efforts and support to be targeted to the students most at risk of underachieving
 - the pupil premium is spent effectively, and that its impact on students' progress is measured.

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.

An external review of the governance of the academy should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 30 and 31 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and held meetings with senior leaders including the principal, vice-principals and other leaders with responsibility for attendance, behaviour, teaching and learning and achievement. The lead inspector also met with the subject leaders for mathematics, English and science, with two representatives of the governing body and a member of the academy sponsor. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation relating to the school's work, including the updated school improvement plan and pupils' progress information. They met with pupils, both formally and informally, in lessons. Inspectors observed 17 part-lessons, some jointly with members of staff, and they also scrutinised pupils' work in books to check on progress since the previous monitoring inspection. Inspectors considered the 74 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 401 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. There were too few responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents) for these to be considered as part of this inspection.

Context

Six members of staff have left the school since the previous monitoring visit in December 2015. The programme of building works for the new school building commenced in March 2016.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders work together extremely well to drive improvement across the school. The actions they have taken to improve attendance, behaviour and teaching and learning are now positively affecting these aspects of provision. Attendance is higher than at the previous monitoring inspection, behaviour continues to improve, particularly in the classroom, and teachers now apply school policies with greater consistency. This has ensured that, on the whole, pupils are getting a much better deal than was previously the case.

Leaders took the findings from the previous monitoring inspection seriously. They have refined systems for identifying pupils in Year 11 who need additional support in order to be successful in this year's GCSE examinations. These are now much sharper and are reviewed weekly, as pupils plug some of the gaps in their previous learning. Consequently, more pupils are on track to achieve good grades across a broad range of subjects than was previously the case.

Subject leaders are now being held to account much more rigorously for the progress pupils make in their departments. They recognise that additional interventions are not always sustainable and that their priority is to improve day-to-

day classroom teaching. They have accurately prioritised areas, such as the curriculum in science, to start making improvements for the longer term. However, they are not yet fully involved in regularly checking on the effectiveness of teaching, and nor do they all have the requisite skills to do so.

Leaders know their teachers well and provide them with detailed advice, and where necessary, support plans to improve their practice. Leaders have ensured that fewer classes are split between teachers and that fewer pupils have supply teachers for long periods of time. Pupils respond positively to adults they know well and this has ensured that the majority of classes now proceed in a calm, orderly and industrious manner.

Leaders' work to monitor the spending of the pupil premium funding is now detailed and increasingly focused on the impact this additional funding is having. Leaders can now identify those pupils who have not yet received any additional support and so are in a better position to re-target resources for maximum impact.

A small, highly committed group of governors continues to provide a sound level of challenge and support to senior staff. They visit the school regularly in order to check first hand on developments and to ensure that the policies they have agreed, for example in relation to safeguarding, are effectively implemented. However, aspects of the main recommendations made by the external review in December 2015 have not been acted upon. This particularly relates to ensuring the appointment of a vice-chair and strengthening the capacity of the governing body through other expert appointments. The sponsor has not supported them effectively enough in order to ensure that these recommendations are met in full.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Staff and pupils confirm that improvements to behaviour mean that, for the majority of the time, learning gets under way quickly. As a result, pupils are making better progress than was previously the case. Teachers follow the school's policies in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. For example, pupils receive frequent feedback on their work and this is now more focused on ways to improve their subject understanding rather than on general comments about presentation or work completion. In some subjects, such as in English, history and art, this has a noticeable impact on improving pupils' subject knowledge and skills.

School leaders have taken steps to ensure that all teachers focus on building basic literacy skills in lessons. However, many pupils still lack confidence in speaking in class and have too few opportunities to develop their thinking and to probe for deeper understanding. This means that in those subjects where this is the case, such as in science, pupils learn key facts but only at a superficial level.

Work in books demonstrates that, in the main, pupils complete the same tasks regardless of their ability or their target grade. This is particularly having an impact

on those pupils who could achieve the highest grades at GCSE level, as they have insufficient opportunities to practise the skills or tackle the harder work that these grades require. Consequently, they continue to make insufficient progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour in lessons has improved substantially since the section 5 inspection in May last year. This is testified to by teachers, the majority of pupils and by the falling number of incidents that require senior leaders to remove pupils from class. The vast majority of pupils have 'bought into' the new vision for the school; they want to do well and appreciate the new, purposeful atmosphere in classes. However, behaviour outside lessons is not as positive, and still requires close supervision by staff. Additionally, pupils do not regulate their behaviour in the small number of lessons that are staffed by supply teachers. At these times, pupils can become over-exuberant and unruly, which spoils the atmosphere of the school.

Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning, although many are ill prepared for lessons to start, relying on their teacher to supply them with the necessary equipment. Their books show that they usually take pride in their work, and follow the school's expectations on presentation well.

Attendance has improved since December, and internal truancy is no longer an issue. Leaders apply the school's safeguarding policy well, particularly in relation to the numerous referrals to external agencies. They have also taken strenuous action to combat the potential impact of local racist pressure groups. The overwhelming majority of pupils say that the school teaches them to be tolerant and accept differences. However, risk assessments of workshops and science laboratories are not applied as assiduously as they should be. This undermines the overall safety of pupils on the school site.

A tailored programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is in place and is appropriately supported by external agencies. Pupils' feedback shows that they have a much greater awareness of how to keep themselves safe online. However, just under a third of pupils who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire stated that the school needed to do more to support their emotional and mental well-being, and that they did not feel that there was an adult they could go to if they had concerns. This was particularly the case for older pupils. At the same time, about the same proportion of pupils, from all year groups in the school, expressed the view that adults did not deal with bullying effectively. Leaders understand that this is a priority for action.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders have worked hard to ensure that the information they hold on pupils' progress is accurate, through a range of measures set up to check and moderate teachers' assessments. This is showing that more pupils in the current Year 11 are

on track to achieve five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics. While these predictions would still place the school below the government's floor standards (the minimum expectations for achievement by the end of key stage 4), the progress pupils are making across a wider range of subjects has increased. Additionally, there are few gaps for groups of pupils that are at risk of underperforming, such as boys or those disadvantaged pupils entitled to free school meals. This evidences the positive impact of the extensive range of additional support sessions that these pupils have received.

Leaders have also established new expectations for achievement by reshaping the curriculum for current Year 8 pupils who will start their GCSEs next year. The vast majority of pupils will be expected to follow an academic programme of subjects leading to the award of the English Baccalaureate. This is an important change, as it raises expectations and the aspirations of pupils and their families.

Work in books shows that pupils' progress is improving across the vast majority of their subjects. However, pupils do not get enough opportunity to develop their learning in mathematics in Years 7 and 8. Evidence from books shows that too many pupils fail to secure their knowledge of one subject area before they are tested and move on to another. This is leaving gaps in their knowledge and understanding. In science, curriculum planning does not yet build progressive gains in understanding and skills. In addition, work in English in Year 7 in particular does not build on prior learning from key stage 2, and nor does it meet the rigour of the new national curriculum for this subject. These weaknesses in teaching and assessment are acting as limits to the long-term progress pupils make in these subjects.

External support

The school organises support for curriculum areas as and when leaders identify that it is needed. They have bought into a number of programmes for improving the way in which they track progress information and, more recently, for helping to build confidence and resilience in pupils. These initiatives are at an early stage of development. The sponsor has supported the school in placing a second substantive vice-principal on the leadership team, and an adviser regularly meets with the principal to report on improvements. However, the sponsor has not supported the governing body effectively enough in ensuring that it has enough capacity to act on all the findings from the review of governance from December 2015.

Priority for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, governors and the academy sponsor should ensure that they act on all the main recommendations from the external review of governance that took place in December 2015.