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Martin McGarry
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr McGarry

No formal designation monitoring inspection of St Ivo School

Following my visit to your academy on 21 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about complaints received about the leadership and management, and governance of the academy.

Evidence

The inspector considered evidence including:

- discussions with academy leaders and staff
- discussions with governors
- observations of students learning in lessons
- discussions with a group of Year 11 students
- documentary evidence provided by the academy.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time: Leaders and managers have not taken effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the academy's previous inspection.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the academy to review the progress made in resolving the areas for improvement raised in the last inspection and to gauge whether it is on track to be judged good at its re-inspection.

Context

St Ivo school is a larger than average academy. The percentage of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding to support disadvantaged

students) is below the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below that found nationally. The proportions of students that are disabled or have special educational needs, mostly behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, and those with a statement of special educational need are above national averages.

Since the last inspection, 20 teachers have left the academy. Twenty-four new staff joined in September 2014, including seven newly-qualified teachers. The headteacher left the academy in November 2014. An acting headteacher currently leads the academy on a temporary basis until a new, substantive headteacher is appointed. The Chair of the Governing Body has retired. A new Chair was elected in January 2015.

Leadership and management of the academy

The academy has experienced a period of turbulence caused by the departure of the headteacher. The news of his mutually agreed departure was not communicated to parents and carers well enough by the governing body. This led to a number of complaints received by the academy, the Department for Education and Ofsted. Senior leaders are managing this turbulence. Morale remains high and staff are supportive of the acting headteacher.

During this period, too much of the governors' and senior leaders' time has been absorbed dealing with these complaints. This has deflected their attention away from ensuring that the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection are dealt with fully. Some improvements are being made but, currently, not enough is being done to strengthen teaching or raise the achievement of all students. Governors are not providing enough challenge for the acting headteacher. They are not holding senior leaders to account for securing improvements at a sufficient rate to ensure that the academy is well-placed to be judged good at its re-inspection.

GCSE results improved in 2014. A higher percentage of students attained five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. However, this masks some significant underachievement, particularly in mathematics and amongst those groups of students identified as under-performing at the time of the last inspection. The progress of students eligible for the pupil premium has improved significantly in English but not in mathematics. Achievement data are shared with governors but only at a superficial level. When asked, they were unclear about how well students are currently achieving, or where the strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie. Their understanding of how well the disadvantaged students are progressing is weak, so they are unable to hold teachers and leaders to account for improving their performance.

Students do not make enough progress in several subjects because much of the teaching still requires improvement, and the strategies introduced to improve it are inconsistent. A new strategy to improve teaching, including sharing learning intentions and success criteria with students, providing them with regular feedback and supporting each other when learning has been introduced but is not fully embedded. Students' books show that not all staff apply the agreed procedures for marking or for enabling students to evaluate 'how I am doing' against their target grades. Routine scrutiny of books is not leading to higher standards of presentation

which remains weak in several subjects. These inconsistencies are not being eradicated by senior leaders' monitoring because their expectations of students and teachers are not high enough.

An additional lesson at the end of each day has been introduced to offer further support for more able students in Year 11 as they prepare for examinations later this year. Students not in the top sets for English and mathematics shared their concerns with the inspector about the variable quality of teaching they receive, and that not enough is expected of them. Some of them feel that they are capable of attaining much higher grades than those set for them, and want further support and guidance to enable them to achieve this.

Learning walks carried out jointly with senior leaders confirmed that regular staff training and routine monitoring of lessons are leading to some improvements in teaching, most notably in English. Teachers provide students with detailed feedback about their work and expect them to respond to the comments made. Students say they value this improved feedback because it helps them improve. Most teachers display good subject knowledge and know their students well, but only a few of them use the information gained from marking and assessment to plan learning matched to their different abilities. During lessons, different success criteria are shared with students but they usually end up doing the same work, at a rate determined by the teacher. This restricts the progress of more able students as tasks are too easy for them.

Senior leaders' views of the academy are not based on an up-to-date evaluation of the improvements being made. The improvement plan is not sufficiently focused on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. For example, one of the key priorities is improving behaviour which was judged to be good in May 2014. Plans prioritise improving teaching but not improving the way homework is used to promote learning. Students say that in some subjects they are set homework regularly, but in others they do not receive enough of it. Plans do not express clearly what is being done to improve provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. This makes it difficult for senior leaders and governors to gauge the impact made on improving their progress. The improvement plan is currently being updated.

Priorities for further improvement

- as a matter of urgency, improve communication with parents and carers in order to resolve their concerns and enable senior leaders and governors to focus fully on raising achievement
- by April 2015, undertake an external review of governance to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved, and produce a plan to increase the effectiveness of the governing body
- thoroughly evaluate the impact of senior and middle leaders in strengthening teaching and raising the achievement of students who are more able, are supported by the pupil premium or are disabled or have special educational needs, and use this information to inform the academy's plans to accelerate the rate of improvement

- provide governors with the information and the understanding they need to question senior leaders about their effectiveness in securing improvements, and ensure that this enhanced level of challenge is clearly expressed in the minutes of governors' meetings

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector