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Mr T Langston
Headteacher
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Cheshire
CW2 7NQ

Dear Mr Langston

Special measures monitoring inspection of Kings Grove School

Following my visit with Leszek Iwaskow, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 30 and 31 January 2013, 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 March 2012. 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.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children and Adults' Services for Cheshire East.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012

- Ensure that leaders, managers and the governing body comply with statutory requirements for safeguarding students and that all necessary recruitment checks are made promptly and all records are kept up to date.
- Increase the proportion of students gaining at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, so that it meets or exceeds national levels at the end of Key Stage 4 by:
 - using the analysis of achievement data to plan effective support programmes for underachieving groups
 - ensuring that support in lessons is deployed effectively
 - developing a whole-school approach to improving literacy and numeracy across the curriculum
 - improving attendance, particularly for groups whose attendance falls below the national average.
- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring a consistently detailed approach to lesson planning with clear objectives and suitably staged, levelled outcomes that challenge and engage students of all abilities
 - checking that teachers provide learning resources and activities adapted to students' specific learning needs.
- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels on raising achievement by:
 - developing the skills of all those with leadership responsibility, including the governing body, to support effective monitoring and evaluation of the school's work
 - ensuring that assessment information is accurate in all subjects and its use is monitored rigorously so that learning opportunities fully meet the needs of different groups of students
 - ensuring that the system for behaviour management is applied consistently by all staff and understood by students
 - monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision, including additional support for students in the school's seclusion centre and for students subject to a fixed-term exclusion.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 30 and 31 January 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with members of the school's extended leadership team, five members of the governing body including the Chair, and two representatives of the local authority. Discussions also took place with a number of teachers and other members of staff. A telephone discussion was held with the Chair of the Cooperative Trust. Teaching and learning were directly observed in 12 lessons, five of these carried out jointly with members of the leadership team. On the first day of the inspection, inspectors held discussions with randomly selected groups of students taken from each of the observed classes.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in October 2012, two members of the senior leadership team have left the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The students' achievements in GCSE examinations in 2012 were reported on in the first monitoring inspection letter.

Students' learning and progress observed in lessons during this monitoring inspection were similar to that seen during the first visit in October 2012. Although it is beginning to improve, the progress students are making is not yet good enough to make up for underachievement in the past. Most students respond well when expectations are raised and they are required to take more responsibility for their learning. For example, Year 11 students in music and dance lessons made good progress to develop and improve their composition and performance skills. Students in Years 10 and 11 made good progress in business studies' lessons. They worked independently, were able to think for themselves and formulate their own questions, thereby increasing their knowledge and understanding of organisational structures. In such cases, students' levels of enjoyment and motivation translate into good quality learning. If students are struggling with their work because of gaps in their basic literacy or numeracy skills, their interest wanes and progress is slower. This is sometimes the case for a minority of less-able students in mathematics or English lessons, for instance.

The school's data on students' attainment and progress indicate a likely rise in the proportion of Year 11 students achieving five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, in 2013. Leaders recognise that students' progress needs to be more rapid right from the start of Key Stage 3 to ensure that improvements in achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 are sustainable in the longer term.

The quality of teaching

Teaching continues to improve steadily, although not enough is consistently good. Leaders' evaluations of teaching are occasionally overgenerous when they focus more on what the teacher does and the methods they use, rather than on the impact they have on students' learning. The following features of teaching were seen to lead to good or better progress in the more effective lessons and therefore need to be more consistently evident across the school:

- a brisk pace to the learning with a healthy element of challenge that may take students 'out of their comfort zone' without overstretching them beyond the limit of their understanding
- raised expectations of what students of all ability groups are capable of achieving
- ensuring that gaps in students' basic literacy and numeracy skills are remedied before planning tasks that stretch their learning further
- using skilful questioning methods to probe students' knowledge and understanding and encourage them to think more deeply and express themselves clearly
- a range of teaching strategies used to engage and motivate students to want to learn
- using checks of students' work selectively and appropriately in lessons, ensuring that assessment is purposeful and does not reduce the time available for new learning
- teachers having excellent knowledge of the expected progression in learning within their subject
- regular feedback to students through good quality marking that gives clear guidance on their strengths and targets for improvement.

There have been changes to the allocation and responsibilities of teaching assistants to increase their involvement in supporting teaching and learning across subject departments. Their roles are more targeted to utilise the skills and strengths of individual staff. The positive impact of this was seen in some lessons, including music and English, where assistants made a valuable contribution to students' learning because of their own knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. Teaching assistants also attend departmental meetings and whole-staff training.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour continues to improve around school and in most lessons. Students who spoke with inspectors did not raise any concerns about behaviour. They clearly understand the school's expectations and what sanctions are in place in the event that these are not met. The rigorous systems in place to monitor attendance and behaviour continue to bring steady improvements in the overall attendance figures, and a reduction in the use of fixed-term exclusions.

The school's good quality pastoral care and the effective 'engagement room' facility enable students who are at risk of exclusion or potentially vulnerable in other respects to remain in school. This provision has been reorganised to better meet students' individual needs. Staff monitor its impact on students' learning and adjust work programmes and topics accordingly. There are a number of students using the facility who might otherwise have needed to access external alternative provision. The personalised timetables put in place for those students are helping to keep them at King's Grove to provide continuity in their educational and personal development. The work taking place in the engagement room is being looked at by the local authority as a case study in developing good practice as part of a nationally funded 'Troubled Families' initiative.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the school has improved the way it uses information on attendance and behaviour. It is increasingly effective in analysing patterns in the behaviour of particular groups of students or individuals. This is enabling quicker action to be taken where a need for improvement is identified.

The school is now starting to focus on how students' 'behaviour for learning' can be improved to make a more positive impact on the quality and depth of their learning and overall achievement across a range of subjects. The school recognises the need to promote further students' independence, initiative and leadership skills.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Further adjustments have been made to the composition and responsibilities of the school's leadership team. There is an increasing sense of urgency in the drive for improvement, as systems and expectations are beginning to become embedded.

The leadership of teaching continues to improve in its effectiveness and impact. The school recognises that to move more of the teaching to be regularly good or better the bar can be raised still further. The format for leaders' observations of lessons is being adjusted to focus more on the impact of teaching and the most appropriate use of assessment to speed up the rate of students' learning, whatever their ability levels. Alongside this, more emphasis is rightly being placed on developing the students' skills to make a positive contribution to their own learning.

A recent change has been made to the leadership of provision for disabled students or those who have special educational needs. The coordinator has made a positive start to the role and is being supported well by senior leaders, including an experienced member of the governing body acting as a mentor.

To some extent, a dip in staff morale and confidence became evident at the end of the autumn term and leaders are keen to remedy this with the input of the staff well-being group. Support and advice from the local authority, the governing body and trust members are helping to overcome those issues. However, they also

understand that this cannot be allowed to deter them from the core purpose of raising standards by challenging underperformance and ensuring that expectations remain high. These aims are incorporated into more tightly-focused targets for the performance management of staff. Plan for mid-year reviews include a key requirement to provide evidence of measurable progress made by students. In addition, the Chair of the Trust is taking on a lead responsibility to monitor the headteacher's performance against challenging targets.

An external review was completed recently by an external consultant with experience of other cooperative schools. This review recognised improvements in the leadership of mathematics but agreed with leaders' identification of weaknesses that remain in the leadership of English. These are being tackled but are yet to have a demonstrable impact on improving outcomes in the subject.

The governing body continues to strengthen its skills, including through the addition of new members, to hold the school to account by checking on its work and questioning leaders and staff. Governors have a clearer understanding of the information provided on students' attainment and progress, and expect this to be summarised and presented in a concise, accessible way. A 'Behaviour and Safety' group of staff includes the site manager and a governor. This group reviews regularly the effectiveness of arrangements for keeping students safe and monitoring their behaviour. All statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.

The school is committed to utilising its status as a foundation cooperative trust to mutual benefit with its partners in the local community, and through the school's business and enterprise specialism. Good links with primary schools enable Kings Grove staff to support projects such as activity days, mathematics work and enterprise events. The partnership with South Cheshire College has led to the introduction of an 'honours programme' for students identified as gifted and talented. Plans are in place to develop further the school's engagement with parents and students, ensuring that their voices are heard and views taken into account.

External support

The local authority continues to monitor the school's progress and check that the support it receives from a range of sources is relevant to its needs. The strong partnerships with the cooperative trust provide a good range of skills that are helping to strengthen leadership in particular. For example, the Chair of the Trust's expertise in governance is used to good effect when leading the scrutiny committee that rigorously holds the school to account. Similarly, the support of partners in the cooperative, for example the headteachers of Wistaston Green Primary and Congleton High schools, make a positive contribution to the school's strengthening leadership and governance.