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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 Susan Barkway, Additional Inspector, to your school on 30 April and 1 May 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.

This was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection 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 third monitoring inspection on 30 April/01 May 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with members of the school's leadership team and other staff, five members of the governing body including the Chair of the Co-operative Trust, and two representatives of the local authority. Teaching and learning were directly observed in 15 lessons, two of which were observed jointly with one of the curriculum team leaders.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the context of the school or its extended leadership team since the previous monitoring inspection in February 2013.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' learning and progress are improving, as a result of the steadily improving proportion of teaching that is good. The school's concerted efforts to raise attainment are beginning to pay off, particularly in Key Stage 4. The current Year 11 students' achievements in GCSE examinations are confidently expected to demonstrate a good increase in key measures since 2012. This takes into account the results that have already been secured in English and mathematics. The school recognises that as attainment is rising, it is vital to keep momentum so that standards reach and exceed national averages in subsequent years.

Close attention is paid to the analysis of information about the performance of different groups of students, to look for ways of narrowing gaps in attainment. The school makes better use of information about students' prior attainment to track their progress and intervene more quickly when additional support is needed. For example, a range of successful strategies are being used to enable those students in all year groups who are disabled or have special educational needs to make good progress. Interventions and specialist language assistance are also making a positive contribution to narrowing gaps in attainment for those students whose first language is not English.

A positive start has been made to raise the profile of reading, exploring ways to improve students' enjoyment and confidence in reading a range of texts across the curriculum. The success of this is particularly evident for the younger students and an increasing number of parents are becoming involved in helping their child to read, especially when they need more encouragement and support.

Students continue to respond well to teachers' raised expectations, and to the drive to make them take more responsibility for their own learning. Students in a Year 10

science lesson made excellent progress in their knowledge and understanding of thermal decomposition of transition metals. A key factor in this was their ability to work responsibly and safely on practical tasks in small groups, discussing their work as they went along. Individual students then confidently explained their findings to other groups who had completed different experiments. The teacher's role was successful in facilitating and challenging students' learning rather than over-directing it. In the least successful lessons not all students achieve the learning outcomes expected of them. This occurs when teachers provide tasks that are poorly matched to students' capabilities and fail to motivate them, and their behaviour is not effectively managed.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is good or better in a growing proportion of lessons. Staff have acted on feedback and guidance to start to tailor their teaching strategies more effectively to different situations or subjects. They are more aware that the structure and timing of lessons do not need to follow a 'one size fits all' tightly-prescribed formula. Teachers are developing the confidence to raise expectations and hand more responsibility to students themselves.

Teachers have a much better understanding of the role and use of information on students' attainment and progress over time. They understand how they are held to account for their own responsibility in raising standards across the school. More teachers are now using the tracking information on students' achievements more effectively at classroom level, to inform their planning. Where this is successful, lesson activities and teachers' questioning provide the right level of challenge for students of all abilities. Students in a lower ability Year 9 group, for instance, were stretched by the teacher's questioning to provide more detailed responses that developed their understanding of skim-reading and inference. Students in Year 10 food studies were clear about why they enjoy the subject; 'we get opportunities to experiment and develop our own ideas'. The teacher's thorough knowledge of individual students was used effectively to provide additional support where required, with more sophisticated recipes and challenge for others. The work of the teaching assistant also made a positive contribution to the good progress of all students. On a very few occasions, teachers' classroom management or planning and organisation of tasks are weak and lead to a lack of clarity in what students are expected to do or learn. Consequently, students become frustrated or confused and behaviour deteriorates, so that little, if any, new learning takes place.

The positive features of teaching identified in the previous monitoring inspection rightly remain at the top of the school's priorities for developing consistency across the school in order to accelerate students' rates of progress. During this monitoring inspection the following elements were discussed with leaders as 'next steps' for improvement to raise the quality of teaching and learning further:

- ensure that all teachers apply the criteria in their plans for 'three different levels of expected learning' effectively. This should allow more-able students to start at the higher levels straight away in some lessons so that time is not wasted on revisiting knowledge that they have already grasped
- continue to adjust teaching strategies to closely meet students' needs in different lessons; for example by considering how much emphasis needs to be on individual or group work, teacher instruction and questioning
- although all teachers are making use of the school's marking policy, the link between this and feedback to students needs to be clearer. Teachers could be more specific about how they expect students to respond to verbal or written feedback to correct or improve their work
- continue to raise expectations of students' learning and attitudes, ensuring as much as possible that students take responsibility, use their initiative and respond to higher levels of challenge.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school's strategies to monitor, manage and improve behaviour are generally successful although it is acknowledged that there is a need to focus constantly on this to achieve consistency in the way staff manage any low-level disruption in lessons. A recent review of staff and student views found that in one or two year groups the behaviour of a minority of students is currently unsettled, following a number of mid-year arrivals of new students. However, the 'engagement room' facility provides effective support for the small number of challenging students and exclusions continue to fall.

A recently introduced system to encourage students to assess and take responsibility for their own behaviour appears to be working well. It is helping students to think about their learning behaviours more carefully against clear criteria in a four-grade system, recording these at the end of every lesson. It is particularly successful when teachers ask individual students to explain why they have scored themselves in a certain way and reflect on what they could have done better if it was not the highest grade. As this is often related to their effort levels or contribution to the lesson, it is useful in promoting more effective learning.

A Year 9 group have made great strides in improving their behaviour and attitudes to learning since the start of this academic year and are making better progress as a result: although struggling to convert some of a Shakespeare prologue into modern-day language, they enjoyed the lesson and some gave confident responses to the teacher's challenging questions, for example, 'How did you make that link between pain and rejection?'

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders are now demonstrating a stronger capacity to 'see the bigger picture' and focus in on key priorities without being distracted by day-to-day school management issues or by taking on too many new initiatives. With the challenge and support of the governing body, leaders are more selective about how much external support or training is necessary, to avoid overloading. The school is drawing on the lessons learned during the last year to consolidate its existing developments and secure further improvement. As leadership at all levels is improving, there are now opportunities for the headteacher and deputy to step back a little in some respects and take a more strategic overview of the school. Other senior staff and curriculum leaders are capable of using their initiative and taking responsibility for key aspects of the school's development plans. Leaders and the governing body are aware of the need to ensure that senior leaders have a very high profile and focus on developing cohesion across the school. The dip in staff morale, referred to in the previous monitoring inspection, remains in some respects and ways of remedying this should be further explored.

Effective leadership of teaching has started to develop the skills of curriculum leaders to evaluate the quality of students' learning in lessons. This is a positive move following feedback from the previous monitoring inspection. Subject leaders are supported with brief guidance on what to look for in lessons in order to judge students' progress, without the use of prescriptive 'checklists' of what they expect the teacher to be doing. Consequently, there is a more accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning that is more closely aligned with inspectors' judgements.

External support

The local authority is keeping a check on the school's progress and there is less need for significant support from consultants. It recently conducted a 'stakeholder review', following on from an earlier visit that looked into concerns about staff welfare. This indicated an improving picture in some respects, despite some issues remaining such as the way in which the confidential aspects of the school's pastoral and discipline systems operate.