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14 November 2013

Jon Whitcombe  
Executive Principal  
Chaucer Technology School  
Spring Lane  
Canterbury  
CT1 1SU

Dear Mr Whitcombe

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Chaucer Technology School**

Following my visit with additional inspectors Fatiha Maitland and Ann Short to your school on 12 and 13 November 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 February 2013. 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher to the departments of English, mathematics and science 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 Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely  
Lesley Farmer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013.**

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - developing better assessment procedures, including better marking and feedback to students, so that they understand how to improve their work
  - challenging students more in lessons to engage their attention and accelerate their progress
  - ensuring teachers regularly check students' progress and make changes to their teaching if necessary
  - planning lessons which make it clear what students are expected to learn and which meet their different learning needs
  - ensuring teachers fully implement the school's behaviour policy
  - further improving attendance to maintain continuity in students' learning
  - ensuring the school's literacy policy is more rigorously implemented.
- Improve rates of progress, particularly in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, history and geography, by:
  - ensuring teachers use performance data more effectively to inform their planning
  - building on the recent improvements in English and mathematics to make sure that students learn well in all subjects
  - developing students' literacy skills across different subjects.
- Improve rates of attendance and reduce the number of students who are persistently absent.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - changing the staffing structure so that it provides for greater accountability for the quality of teaching and learning and students' behaviour
  - ensuring there are regular and rigorous checks on the implementation of school policies.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 November 2013**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed parts of 22 lessons and made brief visits to one or two other lessons. Five lesson observations were conducted jointly with school leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentation, including information about students' current achievement, initial analyses of the 2013 provisional GCSE results, the updated action plans, performance management information and leaders' analyses of the quality of teaching. An in-depth scrutiny of students' work in English and mathematics was conducted and meetings were held with the Executive Principal, the head of school and other leaders within the school. I also met with the senior secondary adviser for Kent. I spoke on the telephone with the new Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the Department for Education and the Deputy Director for Children's Services in Kent.

### **Context**

Since the first monitoring visit which took place in May, significant changes to staffing have taken place. During mid-July, the local authority commissioned the Executive Principal of the Swale Academies Trust, a National Leader in Education (NLE), to assume responsibility for leading the school out of special measures. Two new deputy headteachers were immediately appointed on a full-time basis from within the trust. The head of school at Westlands, the lead National Support School within the trust, judged outstanding by Ofsted at its last inspection, has also been assigned to support the leadership of the school for two days a week.

At the end of the summer term, as a result of budgetary restructuring, 28 teachers left the school. Since September, a few others have left by agreement. Most of these posts have already been filled permanently with effect from January. All are currently filled on a temporary basis.

Six trustees from within the Swale Academies' Trust have been appointed to the governing body in order to strengthen governance. During this monitoring visit, a new Chair of the Governing Body was elected. The governors also voted to dissolve the existing Chaucer Trust in favour of an immediate return to community status, thereby enabling the local authority to take a strategic role alongside the Executive Principal in resolving the financial difficulties reported in the first monitoring visit. Governors no longer have delegated responsibilities for the financial management of the school.

Governors and the local authority share a resolute commitment to securing sustainable leadership for the school through a formal sponsorship agreement with the Swale Academies Trust and conversion to academy status.

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

Provisional GCSE results in September 2013 signal a considerable improvement since the section 5 inspection in March 2013 that placed the school in special measures. Good gains across many subjects have been secured including in art and design, French and notably the core subjects of science, English and mathematics. In 2012, the percentage of students securing five or more good passes at GCSE was far below average. This is no longer the case. Standards are now much closer to the national average.

The rate of progress made by students is rising across the school because the quality of teaching in most subjects is improving. In English, well-judged changes to the examination syllabus and additional help for students who need it, for example through Saturday and after-school provision, have yielded significant improvements. Furthermore, a significant proportion of students currently in Year 11 have already secured a good grade in GCSE English and mathematics.

Since their appointment in September, the new senior leaders have improved the system for determining students' targets. All students are now working to challenging aspirational targets and sound systems have been set up to monitor and track their progress towards them. Students are clear about their targets and have a good understanding of what they need to work on to improve. In the light of recent staff changes, leaders have wisely planned to standardise the approach to in-year assessments so that more experienced teachers from within the trust can support new and less experienced staff.

Gaps in the performance of different groups of students, such as those eligible for free school meals, are a high priority for the new leadership team. In 2013, this gap has widened as students' achievement overall has caught up with the national figures. Although good gains have been made in specific cases for some students eligible for free school meals, this is not universally the case. The same is true for disabled students and/or those with special educational needs.

## **The quality of teaching**

Leaders are focused on improving teaching, recognising it as a key priority that is crucial to speeding up students' progress. Since the previous monitoring inspection, teachers have undergone tailored training leading to improvements in their classroom practice. In particular, there is clear evidence of teachers improving their practice as a result of coaching and support provided since the review of teaching and learning conducted in September 2013. Those that have been unwilling to improve their practice have left.

Inspectors found that all teachers plan lessons that are relevant, considered and well resourced. No inadequate teaching was observed during the visit. Lessons are generally more interesting and varied. Leaders have been focusing on developing teachers' range of questioning, and to good effect. Many teachers were observed

using a range of questions to stimulate discussion. However, in some lessons, questioning strategies are limited and do not always challenge students of different abilities.

Marking was in evidence across all subjects within the school. Inspectors evidenced many good examples of high-quality feedback across most subjects, providing clear affirmation of the skills and knowledge that students have developed with specific details of what they now need to improve. However, this is not always the case. In some instances, the feedback is too general, with only an affirmation of students' effort, with insufficient detail of how they can make the necessary improvements.

Overall, teachers are making better use of information about students' prior attainment to plan lessons that broadly match their needs. However, in too many lessons, this information is not yet used well enough to tailor activities for students of differing abilities. In some lessons, students are given exactly the same work to do. In such circumstances, students of lower ability find the work too hard and those of higher ability are not sufficiently challenged.

In the best lessons, teachers adapt work carefully. For example, in a successful English lesson, tasks on the interpretation of a sonnet were tailored to students' individual GCSE target grades. This meant that all students were able to access the tasks successfully with an appropriate degree of challenge.

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

The school provides a calm environment which students fully respect, despite the general 'tiredness' of some of the buildings which, in some instances, are under-utilised, owing to the reduced number of students on roll. Students' behaviour is characterised by generally positive attitudes to learning, even on occasion, when the teaching is dull.

Rates of attendance, despite improvements, remain below the national average. Leaders recognise this as a key priority and sound systems are fully in place to target those that are persistently absent from school, with texts and calls home to parents and carers, and follow-up where necessary.

Students spoke positively about the new behaviour policy which they have noted since September. They welcome the heightened presence of leaders and managers during breaktimes and feel behaviour has improved. They attribute this to these new initiatives and to improvements in teaching.

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

High-calibre external appointments to the leadership of the school since September bring with them relevant and necessary experience of improving failing schools. In their short time in post, the Executive Principal and his team have rigorously set

about building the capacity of all leaders to improve provision. All leaders now have a firmer understanding of the scale of the task to turn teaching around.

Together with existing leaders, they are sustaining staff morale well, while at the same time taking tough decisions and raising expectations. The Executive Principal is not prepared to accept mediocrity in teaching, and rightly so. Those that are unwilling to work to improve their practice have left. Teachers are already able to benefit from the high-quality training programme within the trust. For Chaucer staff, this provides the much-needed access and opportunity to learn from outstanding practice, neither of which was available until this term.

The improvement plan now acknowledges all the weaknesses in teaching, assessment and leadership identified in the previous inspection, and sets challenging overall targets for pupils' achievement. Other external reviews, such as the review of teaching and learning conducted by the local authority in the summer term, have also helped clarify for existing leaders what needs to change. Work to improve key areas, such as making sure assessment and tracking information accurately records students' attainment, and teachers' classroom practice, has already taken place. Immediate action was taken in September to ensure that assessment information is uncomplicated and easily accessible for all teachers.

Self-assessment is accurate. The Executive Principal has a strong track record of success in securing rapid improvements. His well-judged actions so far have ensured that the school is now at the point of resolving its budgetary deficit. Proposals to become a sponsored academy are sound. They provide a long-term sustainable future for the school which will enable parents and carers, students and staff to be confident of its place in the community.

Actions taken in relation to leadership, teaching appointments and restructuring have been well judged and timely. Leaders are perceived by students and staff to be making a positive difference.

Urgent action has been taken to improve governance. The new Chair of the Governing Body is clear on his priorities for the future governance of the school and is supported by a strong contingent of governors with appropriate skills and a sound understanding of the task in hand.

### **External support**

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the local authority has taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. Actions in relation to the necessary points for improvement are clearly identified and within a set timescale.

Local authority officers fully acknowledge the urgent need to secure a sustainable future for the school, underpinned by leadership with a proven track record of success. With this in mind, subsequent to the first monitoring visit, they took

immediate action to commission the intervention of the Swale Academies Trust. They have conducted a comprehensive audit of need in relation to secondary school placements within the locality and are entirely clear of the need for this school to serve its local community.

They are presently working with the Executive Principal, in frequent dialogue with the Department for Education, to move the school to academy status as quickly as possible. A plan to reorganise the school's building stock has been agreed, with the necessary renovations and refurbishment included. Local authority officers have committed to recommend to members the underwriting of the school's budgetary deficit in order to expedite matters. At the time of this visit, officials from the Department for Education await confirmation of this commitment in writing.