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6 December 2013

Mrs Lyndsey Kane  
Deputy Headteacher  
Westlands School  
Westlands Lane  
Torquay  
TQ1 3PE

Dear Mrs Kane

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Westlands School**

Following my visit to your school on 5 December 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the deputy headteacher in the absence of the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, a representative from the local authority, senior and subject leaders, and students, including sixth form students. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plans were evaluated. In addition, short visits were carried out with the deputy headteacher to a number of lessons, mainly in English, mathematics and science.

### **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection the school has met with a representative from the Department for Education to discuss arrangements for becoming a sponsored academy. The headteacher has been on compassionate leave for the past few weeks.

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

Governors and senior leaders are now monitoring and evaluating the progress of all students rigorously across the school in order to address the decline in standards in recent years. They are being supported in this work by a National Leader of Education and staff from his outstanding teaching school. The new system for monitoring students' progress is too recent, however, to have prevented a further decline in the GCSE results for 2013 which fell below the government's floor standards.

Appropriate targets are now being set to raise the aspirations of students and expectations of staff. Students' progress towards end-of-year targets is monitored each half term and suitable intervention is provided to tackle any underachievement. The school is carrying out joint moderation of the marking of students' work with staff from the teaching school. Consequently, teachers' assessments, which were previously overgenerous, are becoming increasingly accurate.

Students, including those in the grammar stream of this bilateral school, are set according to ability across subjects. Prior to the section 5 inspection, and in the absence of robust progress data and targets, teachers did not adjust their lessons sufficiently to meet the differing learning needs within the set. In the most effective lessons, teachers are now using the targets and their assessments to plan lessons that more closely meet the students' needs. For example, in a Year 11 top set English lesson involving analysis of the language used in poetry, the teacher set expectations at three different levels according to the students' target grades. In a Year 12 mathematics lesson, the teacher discussed the different outcomes expected of different students.

In a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher asked the students to record questions about the author's techniques that they did not understand. She adjusted her lesson to make sure that all the questions were answered. Not all teachers are checking students' understanding enough during lessons and adapting the activities, pace and their questions to promote consistently good progress for all students.

Most teachers are marking students' work more frequently than previously and they are now writing comments to help students to know what to do to improve it. Some of the comments, however, are not linked specifically to the criteria for the next level or grade to help the student to reach it.

Students enjoy practical activities such as science investigations, role-play and discussing pertinent topics in personal, social and health education. Across subjects, however, they are not encouraged to develop the necessary skills to work on their own, for example through investigating, researching and presenting. Sixth form

students say more could be done to prepare them for their A-level courses by developing their independence in the main school, and this was seen to be the case.

Students report that, in some lessons, the lack of active learning strategies results in some students, especially boys, not being engaged in their learning and causing disruption through off-task talking. Students continue to feel safe in school and safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

The leadership skills of senior and middle leaders are being developed appropriately to promote and sustain improvement across the school. Subject leaders in English, mathematics and science, for example, are monitoring and evaluating information on students' progress, students' workbooks, the quality of teaching and teachers' planning. However, they are not yet involving students in providing feedback on the quality of their learning. They are beginning to hold teachers to account for the progress their students are making and to identify and provide for the teachers' professional development needs.

The subject leaders have recently observed good practice in other schools and share this information with their departments. This is helping to raise teachers' expectations of students, for example more students are being entered for higher grade examination papers. The school has not yet identified the features of good or better practice that it expects to see in all lessons.

Governors are beginning to hold the school to account more rigorously for the standards students reach, and the progress of different groups including those supported by the pupil premium. This is made easier because of improvements in the monitoring and evaluation of students' progress. Governors are not yet monitoring and evaluating systematically the school's progress in addressing the areas identified in the section 5 inspection through an action plan. This is proving difficult because the areas are included in separate plans and the plans do not contain measurable outcomes for each half term to check the school is on track to reach its targets. Due to the absence of the headteacher, the action plans have not been shared with the staff to provide clear expectations for them. This uncertainty is not helping to raise staff morale.

As a result of their external review, governors are aware of the need to review roles and responsibilities within the governing body to support its monitoring role. They are also aware of the need to review roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team in order to focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning to bring about more rapid improvement in raising attainment.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose. The local authority has negotiated effective support from the National Leader of Education, the local teaching school and support for staffing issues from its human resources department. During the absence of the headteacher, more time is required from the National Leader of Education to help provide clear direction for the staff.

The school's action plans are not fit for purpose. There is no overall plan with measurable outcomes by which governors can monitor the school's progress each half term and make sure the identified areas for improvement are addressed before the school's next section 5 inspection. There is no mention of how parents and carers will be consulted or how they will be informed about the improvements.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Torbay. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater

**Her Majesty's Inspector**