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Ms Gail Giles
Headteacher
Alfreton Grange Arts College
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Dear Ms Giles

Special measures monitoring inspection of Alfreton Grange Arts College

Following my visit to your school on 17 December with Julia Wright HMI, 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 the acting headteacher and other leaders gave during the inspection and for the time that was 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 September 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and other senior leaders, including those responsible for science, members of the governing body and the school's adviser from the local authority. I visited classes and spoke informally with some students. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection a consultant deputy headteacher has been appointed to the leadership team on a temporary basis. The leadership team has been restructured to include two internal posts which have a renewed focus on improving

the quality of teaching and behaviour across the school. A new coordinator for disabled students and those who have special educational needs has been appointed. School leaders are currently considering conversion to academy status.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

School leaders have taken decisive action following the inspection in September. They have put together a coherent improvement plan with appropriate actions which clearly identifies those responsible for driving aspects of school improvement. This is complemented by a planned cycle of regular monitoring and intervention, through which it is clear how governors and the local authority will keep a check on the progress leaders make in improving the school. Leaders know that the criteria against which they make these judgements need strengthening. Currently, there are too few targets for the progress that specific groups of students should be making across subjects; in particular, they need to be set for more-able students, boys, and disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

Leaders have rightly focused on ensuring they have a better picture of the quality of teaching, especially in English, mathematics and science. To this end, they have conducted full reviews of these departments as well as of provision in the sixth form. They have done so in partnership with consultants from the local authority and have thus ensured an impartial and accurate analysis. At the time of this visit, the science report had been written and was scrutinised by inspectors. This shows that the curriculum in science is now fit for purpose. However, owing to significant differences in the quality of teaching, some students continue to make inadequate progress in their knowledge and understanding of this subject.

Extensive support for improving the quality of teaching throughout the school has been organised. Alongside professional training, a school-wide system for performance management is now in place and some teachers have additional individual support plans. The senior leadership team established by the acting headteacher comprises committed, but largely inexperienced, members of staff some of whom are 'acting up' to their positions. This team has been strengthened by the external support that has been brokered by the local authority. However, there are early signs of the impact it is having, particularly in patterns of attendance, which have now improved for all year groups in comparison with the previous academic year.

Governors have a good understanding of the actions that need to be taken to improve the school and are better placed to ask challenging questions of leaders. They are now more actively involved in monitoring improvements at first hand. For example, two governors have directly worked with the leaders of science to draw up

an action plan following the recent departmental review. Governors know that they need to prioritise their work, and the information they receive, to ensure they sustain a sharp focus on the progress students are making and importantly, on the impact of actions to improve the quality of teaching.

The local authority's statement of action identifies the considerable support that school leaders need. Consultants from the local authority regularly work with teachers within the English, mathematics and science departments. A temporary deputy headteacher has been appointed to the leadership team and additional support has been brokered from a National Leader of Education. These arrangements have strengthened the school's capacity for making rapid improvements. Clear arrangements are in place to regularly monitor the school and review the support it needs over the next few terms.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

the local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose

the school's improvement plan is fit for purpose

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

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

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley
Her Majesty's Inspector