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14 March 2014

Ms Gail Giles  
Headteacher  
Alfreton Grange Arts College  
Grange Street  
Alfreton  
DE55 7JA

Dear Ms Giles

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Alfreton Grange Arts College**

Following my visit with Zarina Connolly, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Julia Wright, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 12–13 March 2014, 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 staff gave during the inspection and for the time they 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 September 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 school may appoint one newly qualified teacher to each of the English, mathematics and science departments 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Make sure teaching is good or better by ensuring all teachers, and particularly in science:
  - plan high-quality, relevant learning in lessons that challenges and engages students
  - mark work regularly so that students understand how to make progress
  - ask thought-provoking questions that extend students' understanding of, and interest in, their work.
- Raise the achievement of all groups, particularly boys, the most-able and disabled students and those who have special educational needs by:
  - consistently setting tasks appropriate to students' ability levels
  - ensuring sixth form students are placed on courses that reflect their abilities and ensure they are better prepared for life after school
  - ensuring that the curriculum in science provides appropriate opportunities for practical work is better planned and organised so that work is challenging and not repeated in different year-groups.
- Improve behaviour and safety by:
  - ensuring that all teachers address poor student behaviour, including low-level disruption, rigorously and consistently both in the classroom and around the school site
  - eliminate the pattern of repeated poor behaviour of a few students by providing training for teachers and leaders in techniques for managing challenging behaviour
  - increasing student attendance by researching and implementing techniques used successfully in other schools.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - establishing an effective, school-wide system of teacher performance management which is both robust and transparent
  - developing the skills of the school's senior and middle leaders in monitoring patterns of student performance and in curriculum design, so that they have an increased impact on student achievement.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12–13 March 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed 19 parts of lessons, four of which were jointly observed by senior leaders. They observed students working in the Spyra Centre as well as conducting shorter observations of students' attitudes to learning across a range of subjects, including in science. Inspectors scrutinised examples of students' work in English, mathematics and science, and discussed the school's progress with two groups of students. They held meetings with the acting headteacher, consultant deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. They also met with representatives from the governing body and the local authority. Inspectors scrutinised a range of information relating to students' progress, curriculum development, records of governing body meetings and the school development plan and self-evaluation. One inspector also scrutinised the school's records and systems relating to keeping students safe; this included staff recruitment, behaviour, attendance and exclusion information.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection in December 2013, two members of staff have left the school. A new coordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) took up post in January. Governors have appointed a new deputy headteacher, who will join the school after Easter. The headteacher was absent from school at the time of this inspection.

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

Students' progress in English, mathematics and science has improved since the section 5 inspection in September. More students in the current Year 11 are on track to make expected or better progress in these subjects. This includes those groups of students who were underachieving at the time of the previous inspection. Boys and students who are disabled or who have special educational needs are making much more progress than these groups made in the 2013 GCSE examinations. Additionally, school data shows that more students are on track to achieve the higher GCSE grades, particularly in English and mathematics.

Provision in science has improved since the last inspection. Students have more opportunities to engage in practical work. They are studying appropriate qualifications and have more time in which to do so. Consequently, their achievement in science has improved. However, progress is not yet in line with that in English and mathematics and, whilst standards are set to improve by the end of Key Stage 4, they still fall well below the national average. More-able students, in

particular, continue to fail to make the progress they should in reaching the highest grades across all the science subjects.

Achievement in the sixth form is improving. A significant change has been made to the entry requirements for studying academic qualifications, and this is resulting in more students successfully continuing on these courses. Where 25% of students discontinued courses in the 2012-2013 academic year, just four have done so since last September. Additionally, the progress of students in many sixth form subjects has also improved, particularly so for the current Year 12.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teachers receive detailed information on the prior achievement of their students. Students have appropriately challenging targets based on this information. Teachers are using this information in their planning; however, they do so with varying degrees of success. Some teachers plan lessons that build and extend learning, including for the more able, and students make rapid progress in these classes. However, other teachers continue to set objectives for learning that do not challenge students enough. In these lessons, progress is limited because expectations are too low.

Teaching quality varies widely, both within subjects and across the school as a whole. This is particularly the case in science, where achievement is improving despite the quality of teaching, which has not improved significantly since the last inspection. Some inadequate teaching remains. However, this subject is better resourced and greater opportunities for students to engage in practical activities have improved their enjoyment of and engagement in science. Students themselves report that their learning is improving and additional support from teachers is helping them to be better prepared for their examinations.

Training for teachers has been provided in a number of areas, including in the effective use of questioning in lessons and on developing a whole-school approach to written assessment. However, a significant proportion of teachers reported to inspectors that they have insufficient opportunities to develop their professional expertise. While some highly effective questioning and marking was seen during this inspection, this remains limited to individual teachers.

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

The school's systems for monitoring the behaviour of students have improved since the last inspection, and incidents of poor behaviour are now recorded accurately. These show that the vast majority of incidents relate to students being defiant towards staff. Staff report that behaviour continues to be managed inconsistently and a significant number still view behaviour as being a concern in the school. During this inspection, few incidences of poor behaviour were observed. Students

are punctual to lessons and largely co-operate well with each other and with adults. Where students were disruptive, this was as a direct result of the quality of teaching and the ineffectiveness of behaviour management.

Attendance has improved since the section 5 inspection in September and is now above the national average. This is as a direct result of the school working closely with teachers, students and their families in order to raise the profile of good attendance. Fixed-term exclusions are also lower than is found nationally in other secondary schools. Tailored interventions for more vulnerable students through the Spyra Centre have increased their attendance by 18% since September. The attendance of students in the sixth form has also improved over the same period.

The school's systems for keeping students safe are secure.

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

A transparent, school-wide system for performance management is now in place and is being used to hold teachers to account for the progress made by students. Leaders' plans for systematically challenging and supporting staff are, in theory, sound. However, they are not fully established enough to have had a measurable impact on teachers' performance. It is also apparent that, while staff broadly support the need for school improvement, a significant number of them have little confidence in school leaders. This is impeding the pace of improvement, particularly to the quality of teaching.

The effectiveness of many of the school's senior leaders has improved since the previous inspection. The work of the new coordinator for special educational needs, the pastoral director and the head of sixth form have had a noticeable impact on students' achievement and attendance. Senior leaders have established effective systems for tracking and analysing the progress students make. They have improved the curriculum, both in the highlighted areas from the previous inspection and for the school as a whole. These changes ensure that students receive appropriate guidance and are better prepared for the next stage in their education. However, the impact of middle leaders in building consistently high expectations across their subject areas is less evident. Consequently, the wide variability seen at the last inspection, remains.

Governors are actively involved in monitoring developments within the school at first hand. They are directly linked to key aspects of the school action plan and regularly visit, observe learning and talk to staff. They recognise that staff morale is low and are committed to supporting them whilst emphasising the urgency of improvements that are needed. Governors' meetings evidence their analysis of the effectiveness of actions that have been taken and of their sharp focus on the progress that students and groups of students are making.

## **External support**

The local authority has provided effective support to the science department, both through the review of the curriculum and schemes of work and also by funding additional resources for practical lessons. Senior leaders have also received support from a National Leader of Education and their school. The local authority monitors the school through 'Progress review' meetings. However, the agenda for these meetings are generic, rather than sharply focused on the school's own priorities for improvement.