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

Dear Mrs Giles

Special measures monitoring inspection of Alfreton Grange Arts College

Following my visit with Chris Fallon, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9–10 July 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 the executive headteacher gave during the inspection and for the time he made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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 not appoint any more newly qualified teachers 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, to Mary Kerry, the Chair of the Governing Body, to Ian Thomas, the Strategic Director of Children and Younger Adults Services for Derbyshire and to the Education Funding Agency.

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 and 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
 - eliminating 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 third monitoring inspection on 9–10 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed 13 parts of lessons, three of which were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body and the local authority. Inspectors spoke to students, both formally, in meetings, and informally, in classes and around the school. Inspectors scrutinised examples of students' work from across a range of subjects. They also considered the views of 44 staff as reflected in their response to Ofsted's questionnaire.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in March 2014, the governing body, in conjunction with the local authority, has appointed an executive headteacher to lead the school. He took up post in April on a one-year contract. A new, substantive deputy headteacher also started after Easter. A number of teaching staff are leaving the school at the end of this academic year; 12 new teachers have been appointed to start in September 2014. The governing body has agreed to reconstitute and reorganise its committee structure. They have appointed one new governor.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The progress students are making by the end of Key Stage 4 has improved in English, mathematics and science. Whilst fewer students are on track to achieve the standard of five good GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics this year, their progress in these core subjects is broadly in line with national averages. Also, school information shows that there will be a significant increase in the percentage of students achieving two science GCSE qualifications this year. These improvements are set to continue into 2015. However, despite this, some groups of students continue to underachieve. The gap in the standards likely to be reached by boys, in comparison to girls, is not narrowing sufficiently enough. Additionally, those students for whom the school receives additional funding from the government continue to make less progress and reach lower standards than their peers. This is particularly the case for students who enter the school with low prior attainment.

Achievement in the sixth form has improved since the last inspection. Students in the current Year 13 have made more progress in their subjects than students did last year. Moreover, school information shows that significantly more students in Year 12 will achieve an AS qualification in each of their subjects this year. The proportion of students who have remained on their courses in this year group is 91%. This reflects the improved retention rates from last year, and is a direct result

of leaders providing students with more appropriate advice about their programmes of study. There are no significant gaps in the performance of groups of students in the sixth form. In comparison to the rest of the school, boys and students who are entitled to additional support through the pupil premium, achieve at least as well as their peers.

There is less evidence of improvement in the achievement of students at Key Stage 3. This is largely owing to leaders allocating more of their specialist and effective teachers to examination classes. Additionally, teachers' assessment of progress in this key stage is less secure than it is when students are studying for an external qualification. Currently, this data shows that approximately half of all students are on track to make expected progress across English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9. Boys, and students in the current Year 9, have made particularly poor progress this year.

The quality of teaching

There has been significant turnover of teaching staff since the inspection in September 2013. Many teachers have left, or are leaving, and students report they have had a number of temporary supply teachers across a range of subjects. This situation is now stabilising. However, it has had an impact on the pace with which leaders have been able to make improvements to the quality of teaching.

Typically, teachers plan lessons by writing objectives for learning that they base on levels of achievement, or examination grades. Students then complete a series of activities to show if they can meet these standards. However, all too often, learning is superficial, as students do not have enough opportunities to explore their subjects in sufficient depth. Additionally, questions from teachers focus on recalling facts and giving short explanations. Consequently, students' work over time shows they do not build up a depth of understanding to demonstrate they are meeting the levels of achievement planned by their teachers.

The quality of marking remains poor. Some individual teachers mark students' work thoroughly, providing guidance on how to make improvements. However, this is not widespread. Students themselves report that marking largely consists of 'ticks' and they do not get enough help to improve their work. This is impeding the progress they make across a number of subjects.

Teachers report that they are now more able to develop and improve as they receive more supportive guidance from school leaders. A significant number of teachers have signed up to the school's 'Teacher Improvement Programme', as they recognise that leaders want to help them to improve rather than judge them when they fail. Teachers' morale has improved and there is an increased confidence in how improvements to teaching are being led in the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of students, both in lessons and informally around the school and during break times, remains a strength of the school. Students are punctual, and the majority are well prepared for lessons. The vast majority co-operate well with adults and want to learn. This remains the case even when lessons are dull, where students are far more likely to sit quietly rather than disrupt learning for others. However, in discussion with inspectors, students recognised that many teachers do not expect enough of them. They also recognised that this is reflected in their work. The quality of presentation and expectations for writing remain too low. Too often, students are careless when recording their learning, and this shows their lack of engagement in lessons. Consequently, teachers do not embed good technical writing habits, even in the more-able students.

Both students and teachers report that there remains a lack of consistency about how teachers manage behaviour in the classroom. Also, some teachers still repeatedly send out a few students from the classroom to work in isolation from their peers. Individual members of staff have received support and training to improve their management of poor behaviour; nevertheless, they still do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently enough.

School information shows that overall attendance remains broadly in line with the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The new executive headteacher and deputy headteacher have had a significant impact on the work of the school in a very short space of time. Their focus on 'unrelenting positivity' has swiftly improved morale and has built conviction across the whole school community. Staff now report they have confidence in the leadership of the school. This is an important development as it has enabled more staff to engage with the programme for school improvement.

The new leadership team has quickly built up an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have appropriately focused on creating a structured programme for developing the role of subject leaders in leading improvements to teaching in their departments. Alongside this, teachers are receiving specific advice and coaching which focuses on working together to improve practice. There are early signs that this is already starting to have a positive impact. Leaders have also reviewed the curriculum to ensure that, from next year, students will study an appropriate range of GCSE qualifications and will have increased time to study these.

Governors continue to monitor improvements at first hand. Their links to some subject departments mean they know how much staff confidence has improved and they can see the impact new leaders have had. They have recently reviewed their committee structure, with a view to organising themselves strategically around key

aspects of school improvement. Governors have been key in securing the leadership of the school in the interim, and in making budgetary decisions that have increased the capacity for improvement in science.

External support

The local authority continues to support and monitor the school effectively. Through the appointment of the executive headteacher, it has been instrumental in securing the temporary leadership of the school at a highly vulnerable time. This has enabled a strategic partnership with the executive headteacher's own school, with additional support that he has planned from September 2014. The local authority's science adviser continues to provide valued support to the leadership and teachers within this department. This has ensured a more accurate system for assessing and tracking students' achievement. As a result, the pace of improvement in this department has not slowed despite some significant staffing turbulence.