6 November 2014

Mrs L Lyon
Mount Gilbert School
Hinkshay Road
Dawley
Telford
TF4 3PP

Dear Mrs Lyon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Mount Gilbert School

Following my visit with Sue Morris-King Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on
4–5 November 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 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 March 2014.
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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint 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, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for
Telford and Wrekin.

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that students make the progress of which they are capable, by ensuring that all teachers:
  - assess students' ongoing progress and learning so that they know how well the students are doing
  - provide work that builds well on what students already know, is not too easy or too hard for them and which they find interesting
  - mark students' work and provide written and verbal feedback to students about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work.

- Improve students' skills in English and mathematics by making sure that:
  - there are high expectations of what students can achieve, particularly in the progress they can make
  - subject and school leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and marking to bring about improvements in teachers' practice.

- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes by:
  - providing a better range of subjects and activities that meet students' needs and interests more effectively so that they attend more often and take better care over their work
  - ensuring that all staff have the skills to support students in their behaviour and are consistent in managing incidents of inappropriate behaviour
  - establishing clear consequences for behaviour that are effective in modifying poor behaviour and reducing fixed-term exclusions
  - strengthening the rewards system further, and its use by staff, so that students are more aware of the advantages of good behaviour
  - ensuring that the new systems for addressing poor attendance have a positive impact on getting students into school and reducing absence.

- Improve leadership and management and governance so that they are effective in bringing about improvements at a rapid pace by ensuring that:
  - checks on the quality of teaching and progress are far more rigorous so that areas for development are identified and tackled quickly
  - the school's plan for improvement identifies the right priorities and sets clear, measurable targets and timelines for improvement
  - procedures for tracking the progress of students are comprehensive and are used to hold staff to account for students' progress where it is not good enough
  - subject leaders have a clear understanding of the progress of students and the strengths and areas for improvement in their subjects
  - governors set school leaders clear targets for improvement and are rigorous in checking that these have been achieved

- checks on the spending of pupil premium funding from the government, and the Year 7 'catch up' funding, are rigorous and that the way funds are used has a positive impact on students' learning.

- Establish more rigorous systems for checking how well students are achieving and how safe they are when they attend off-site courses.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4–5 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors visited lessons, looked at the work in students' books, observed break times and lunchtimes, and spoke informally to students and staff. They met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and additional needs manager. Meetings were held with a representative of the governing body and with two representatives of the local authority and the local leader in education (LLE) who is providing support to school leaders. Inspectors visited the school's provision for a group of Key Stage 4 students at The Web Centre and also made visits to off-site provision for small groups of students at the Educational Development Service (EDS) and at Telford Drive. Inspectors also considered written records of the checks made by leaders on the quality of teaching and information about the progress made by students.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three teachers, an administrator and a teaching assistant have left the school. One new teacher, an inclusion co-ordinator and three teaching assistants have joined the staff team. A new business manager and two administrative staff have also joined the school. At the time of the monitoring inspection, one teacher and the inclusion co-ordinator were absent due to ill health. Leaders have been working with the support of the local authority to appoint new English, mathematics, computing and science subject leaders but have not been successful. As a consequence of staff absences and unfilled vacancies, some classes are regularly taught by higher level teaching assistants.

Because of high rates of exclusion and student absence, behaviour and safety were a particular focus for this monitoring inspection.

Achievement of students at the school

Poor attendance and behaviour are having a serious detrimental impact on achievement, particularly for older students. When they do attend school, many Key Stage 4 students spend considerable periods of time out of lessons in corridors or outside the building. This means that they miss important steps in their learning and so their progress is slow. Few students make the progress that they should. As a result, the majority of students leaving the school have few qualifications. However, when in lessons that interest them, many students do engage with adults and complete the work set for them. For example, in a food technology class, students made good progress because they were enjoying the activity and because the higher

level teaching assistant was skilful in questioning them to check their understanding and deepen their learning.

The work in students' books and the written comments made by teachers show that in some lessons students complete a reasonable amount of work and persist, even when tasks are difficult. However, in other lessons little work is completed and presentation is sloppy.

Leaders are working with teachers to try to ensure that the targets set for students' achievement are more ambitious. However, only 60% of the students in Key Stage 4 are currently taking two or more GSCEs, including English and mathematics, and very few students take five or more.

In Key Stage 3, more students are making the progress expected of them and some are making progress which is better than this. Students in the nurture class have settled well and have established positive relationships with staff; this is helping them to make progress in their learning.

The quality of teaching

There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching. In some lessons, students struggle to see the relevance or purpose of the activities planned by teachers and so do not pay attention or refuse to complete the work set for them. However, when they find lessons interesting and work is set at the right level, the students who arrive at the lesson and stay in it tend to co-operate with staff, participate in discussion, ask and answer questions and complete an appropriate amount of work.

In a sports studies lesson, students made good progress because the teacher had a secure knowledge of each student's existing skill level and planned a lesson which effectively built on these starting points. Learning was successful because the teacher included clear explanations and effective modelling, and provided opportunities for skills to be practised and evaluated.

Marking has continued to improve and teachers' comments are becoming more effective in encouraging students and helping them to improve their work. However, this is not yet consistent for all teachers. Praise is sometimes too general to help students understand what they have done well. For example, some comments simply say 'good work' or 'well done'. When teachers identify the next steps for students these are sometimes unhelpful. For example, they ask students to correct their spelling without identifying which words are spelled incorrectly. The most successful marking explains precisely what students have done well and gives clear guidance about what they should do to improve their work, sometimes giving examples or asking questions to check students' understanding.

Behaviour and safety of students

There has been little improvement in the behaviour of students. Overall, students' behaviour remains poor. Incidents of aggression and damage to the building remain frequent.

The use of fixed-term exclusion continues to be extremely high. For example, during the last school year, 39 out of 42 students had at least one fixed-term exclusion and over 450 days of school were lost to exclusion over the year. Since September around half of students, particularly those in Key Stage 4, have had a least one exclusion. Many students are excluded for acts of aggression against staff or other students.

Attendance remains very low. The majority of students are persistently absent. Good attendance is celebrated and individual targets have been set for students to help them improve their attendance. However, these targets are far too low for many students and do not reflect the urgent need to improve attendance rapidly.

The school has placed a small number of students on modified or part-time timetables, in agreement with the local authority. These are sometimes being used inappropriately for extended periods rather than as a short-term measure, for example, to support reintegration after non-attendance.

When students are in school, some refuse to stay in lessons and will sometimes go in and out of other classes, disrupting learning for other students. Many students are openly defiant and use abusive or foul language to staff. Staff consistently remind students not to swear but this has only short-term, if any, impact.

Students regularly leave the school site, especially at break times, even though this is against the school rules. Some students leave in order to smoke and others do so openly in front of staff. Sanctions, such as losing parts of break times, are applied but these have little impact.

Students in Key Stage 3 generally behave more appropriately than older students. The Year 7 and 8 students in the nurture class are responding well to this provision and lessons are generally calm and purposeful so that students are able to make better progress in their learning.

Leaders recognised that the particularly challenging behaviour of some Key Stage 4 students was having an impact on the behaviour and learning of younger students. From September, five Year 11 students have had their lessons for part of each week at The Web Centre which is a short distance away from the main school site. From the start of November a small group of Year 10 students have started to have lessons at the Web Centre for part of the week. When inspectors visited this

provision, students were calm and settled and had completed a good amount of work within the lesson.

All staff have training in behaviour management as part of their induction and there are regular updates and training for all teachers and teaching assistants. However, leaders acknowledge that behaviour is not yet managed consistently by all staff. The school policy for behaviour management has been updated; leaders have ensured that staff and students are clear about the rewards which can be gained and the sanctions which may be imposed. Although students enjoy spending points in the reward catalogue, this system is not being successful in motivating students to behave well. One student explained, 'When I am being good, points help me be better but when I am angry they don't make any difference.'

Information about incidents of poor behaviour and reasons for exclusion is recorded and sometimes summarised. Leaders do not analyse this information well enough to identify common patterns and then use this to inform changes to the timetable or organisation in order to improve behaviour.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The capacity of senior leaders to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection is hampered by the unfilled vacancies for subject leaders together with changes in staff and staff absence. Both the deputy and assistant headteachers have a considerable teaching commitment in addition to their work as school leaders. The headteacher and other school leaders are working diligently to make the necessary improvements, and it is clear that they and other staff care deeply about students and want the best for them. However, despite these high levels of commitment, leaders have not been successful in tackling poor behaviour and attendance. These continue to prevent many students from making progress in their learning.

The headteacher and school leaders have a realistic view of the current position and recognise that the school is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures. The action plan, written by school leaders, is detailed and thorough, and now includes information about how leaders will measure and evaluate improvement. However, the timings on the action plan show that leaders are trying to work on many priorities at the same time and this is reducing their capacity to tackle the most important issues.

School leaders had intended that the newly created role of inclusion co-ordinator would be a significant part of a strategy to manage challenging behaviour more effectively and so reduce the number of exclusions. However, this aim has not been successful and the inclusion co-ordinator is currently absent.

Because of unfilled vacancies and staff absence, leaders have had to make several changes to teaching groups and to timetables for staff and students. The deputy and assistant headteachers are leading and teaching subjects in which they are not specialists and some classes are regularly being taught by higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs). These HLTAs are dedicated and know students well. Senior leaders or teachers meet with them regularly to oversee their planning and marking. They make regular visits to lessons taken by HLTAs and check on the work in students' books. However, leaders and governors know that the lack of suitably qualified teachers is resulting in inequalities for students.

Leaders have continued to make regular checks on the quality of teaching by visiting lessons, looking at the work in students' books and evaluating information about students' progress. Thorough records of these checks are kept and feedback is given to teachers and HLTAs to help them improve their work. However, at times the feedback given is not precise enough and leaders do not set out how and when they will check that the required improvements have been made.

Leaders' systems for collecting and checking students' progress have been further refined and now identify any students who are underachieving in each subject. Teachers are then required to record what interventions have been put in place to support these students. However, teachers are not encouraged to consider and record how they will adapt their own teaching in order to accelerate students' progress. Although information about progress and attainment is collected by school leaders for each subject, this does not include any analysis of which aspects of the subject students find most difficult. For example, information about students' progress in English is collected and reported as an overall level. This does not allow leaders to identify whether weaknesses are in reading, writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation or speaking and listening. As a result, leaders are less able to use their analysis of this information to plan further professional development for staff.

At the time of the first monitoring inspection, leaders had established improved systems for checking on the well-being and progress of students attending work-based placements. However, the planned half-termly visits to each provider have not all taken place and some checks, including those relating to student safety, have not been made.

The local authority and school leaders have supported governors in carrying out a review of governance. The finding of the review was that governance was weak. Governors are keen to see the school succeed but do not provide appropriate levels of challenge and support. Some meetings are poorly attended and so decisions have had to be delayed. Minutes of meetings indicate that governors often do not challenge or question underperformance. For example, when the headteacher reported the very high number of exclusions, the minutes record that 'governors noted the number of exclusions' but do not record any discussion about the reasons for exclusion or the actions being taken to tackle poor behaviour. Since the section 5

inspection, four new governors have joined the governing body and this has brought some additional expertise and capacity. A recently appointed governor who met with an inspector has a clear understanding of the challenges facing the school and recognises that governors must do more to drive improvement and support and challenge school leaders. The local authority are rightly considering different ways of bringing additional expertise and capacity to governance arrangements.

External support

Local authority support has not been successful in helping leaders to address the crucial issues of behaviour and attendance. However, the local authority has limited the number of students joining the school while maintaining the budget so that new staff can be appointed when suitable candidates are identified.

The local authority supported the school in conducting a self-review of governance but this process was not sufficiently rigorous and has taken too long. Eight months after the section 5 inspection, an action plan for improvement in governance has yet to be finalised.

The local authority attached advisor makes regular visits to the school and has provided support and guidance to leaders to help them revise and plan the curriculum, develop systems for assessing students' achievement and evaluate the impact of their work. The local authority has also supported school leaders in their efforts to recruit skilled teachers to fill key posts. However, three important subject leader roles remain unfilled.

School leaders value the guidance of a local leader in education (LLE) who has supported them in revising the curriculum in order to meet students' needs while adjusting to staff vacancies. The LLE has also provided good advice to leaders about staffing issues and about their systems for checking on the work of teachers and on students' progress.

Local authority officers recognise that school leaders are working extremely hard but acknowledge that recruitment and staffing issues continue to hamper their capacity to quickly make the necessary improvements, especially in behaviour and attendance. They are therefore considering options for changes to the school's status and organisation.