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10 November 2014

Ms Alex Newton  
Principal  
Westlands School  
Westlands Lane  
Torquay  
TQ1 3PE

Dear Ms Newton

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

Following my visit with Peter Clifton and Howard Dodd, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 5 and 6 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures, following the inspection which took place in June 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 newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. There is no restriction on the number or department.

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, the Director of Children's Services for Torbay and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better and ensure that by the summer of 2014, all teachers:
  - set work at the right level to challenge all students and make sure that lessons absorb, enthuse and stretch them so that they make at least the progress that is expected of them
  - use questioning more effectively to challenge, engage and encourage students to extend their thinking and develop their reasoning further
  - provide plentiful opportunities for students to use and develop their mathematical skills in meaningful and real-life contexts
  - mark work more regularly and provide students with accurate feedback about how they can improve their work
  - check that students act upon the advice given and can demonstrate a better knowledge and understanding as a result
  - share the best practice seen in teaching, such as engaging students in assessing their own progress and in active learning, and in setting them deadlines to complete tasks that accelerate their progress.
- Raise achievement, particularly for boys and the more able, by:
  - supporting and challenging teachers to bring about rapid improvements to their teaching and leadership and management, especially in English, mathematics and core science
  - ensuring that assessment information is used systematically to better inform the planning of learning for all students in lessons
  - monitoring the progress of individual students better so that all teachers know when to intervene to support those at risk of underachieving
  - eradicating or significantly reducing gaps between different groups of learners and helping students to make better progress in the second year of the sixth form.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance by:
  - involving all leaders, managers and governors in a thorough and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and using this information to construct and implement a clear plan for improvement that includes challenging, measurable targets and timescales, and that has a positive impact on students' learning and progress
  - equipping all leaders with the skills to tackle the school's weaknesses and ensure this is done with greater urgency
  - strengthening the effectiveness of all leaders in monitoring agreed policies and procedures and in taking appropriate actions to raise the quality of teaching to accelerate the progress of learners in a clear, positive and measurable way
  - ensuring that the governing body challenges school leaders about students' examination performance, the quality of teaching and the effective use of pupil-premium funding.

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

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 November 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, including through lesson observations, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and subject leaders, groups of pupils, members of the governing body in the absence of the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.

### **Context**

The new principal took up post in September 2014. The acting headteacher resumed her previous post of vice principal. The number of students on roll is falling, including in the sixth form. The school was due to become a sponsored academy in June 2014. The process has been delayed. The sponsor is Ivybridge Academy Trust. The executive principal of the trust, who is a national leader of education, is supporting the improvements in Westlands School.

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

Students' achievement is improving across all year groups due to more rigorous checking of their progress, effective support and improvements in teaching. However, achievement is uneven across subjects. The school's information indicates that students' progress in English is now strong throughout the school and for all students, including the more able, disabled students, those with special educational needs and students who are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for disadvantaged students). Students in Years 7 and 8 are now reading more regularly and widely because of the introduction of reading programmes. Not enough progress is being made in mathematics, especially for students with special educational needs and those whose prior attainment is not the lowest or highest. Progress is also slow for students in Years 7 to 9 in science. Nonetheless, GCSE results improved in 2014 and were above the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. Achievement was stronger in English and humanities than in mathematics, science and languages. In part, this was a result of the school's policy of all teachers supporting students' literacy skills. The same attention is not yet given to developing students' mathematical skills.

The achievement of students is improving across the sixth form. As in the rest of the school, this is because of more rigorous checking of their progress, effective support from mentors and improvements in teaching. In addition, the school has raised its entry requirements for the sixth form and students are given better guidance on their choice of courses. Achievement is uneven across subjects and courses due to remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Achievement in BTEC courses in

2014 was higher than in AS or A level courses, although achievement at AS and A level improved.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching continues to improve and is leading to improvements in achievement in all year groups, including in the sixth form. Developing strengths include teachers' subject knowledge, their use of homework and resources such as technology, and behaviour management. Most teachers and teaching assistants create a positive climate for learning. Inconsistencies in teaching remain across and within subjects, mainly in the use of assessment. The majority of teachers, including in mathematics, now have higher expectations of what the students can achieve and set work at appropriately challenging levels. They mark students' work regularly and write comments that help them to know what to do to improve it. They are getting better at checking students' progress during the lesson, but are not all skilled at adapting it to meet the different rates of learning. For example, in mathematics lessons, the work is challenging the most able in the class and they make strong progress. Teachers identify those who are struggling to understand, but they are not then adapting the tasks, questions or the rate of learning to help them to make enough progress, while maintaining the faster pace for the most able. Students are now encouraged to link their mathematics lessons to real-life contexts. However, they are not given sufficient opportunities across subjects to apply and extend their mathematical skills.

The school's focus on developing students' basic skills in reading and writing is raising achievement in particular for disabled students, those with special educational needs and disadvantaged students who are supported by the pupil premium. For example, marking across subjects helps students to know what to do to improve their writing as well as to improve their understanding of the subject. In addition, students with gaps in their learning receive additional support, for example from their mentors or in lessons that focus on particular skills such as phonics (linking sounds and letters). All Year 7 and 8 students are encouraged to read more widely through the use of a reading programme. The special educational needs coordinator checks students' progress rigorously and makes sure that teaching assistants provide support that is specific to the students' needs. The specialist teacher for the students with hearing impairment ensures they are well supported in lessons. The literacy team also checks students' progress and provides appropriate lessons to help them to catch-up with others.

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

Attitudes to learning, especially for the boys, are improving because lessons are becoming more interesting. Students are eager to learn and say they enjoy the more challenging work. Behaviour around the school and at breaks is also improving, and is generally calm and orderly. The school's records indicate that there are clear

improvements in behaviour for students with particular behaviour difficulties. The learning inclusion centre supports those at risk of being excluded to remain engaged in their learning and supports them back into the main school. The school has effective procedures to keep pupils safe and secure, including the very small number of students who attend vocational courses at alternative provision. Students say they feel safe in school. They can explain different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe. They say that the few instances of bullying are dealt with effectively by the staff. The school's records appear to support this. Attendance and punctuality are improving due to the school's more rigorous checking and effective work with parents.

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

The new principal has quickly gained a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She is engaging all senior and subject leaders in developing an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, based on lesson observations, examination of teachers' planning and students' books, and analysis of the school's tracking of students' progress. This evaluation is informing appropriate actions for school improvement planning, although measurable 'milestones' have yet to be added. The recent re-structuring of the leadership team ensures that all senior and middle leaders are focusing on raising achievement. For example, heads of year now have responsibility for checking students' progress across all subjects, in addition to their pastoral responsibilities. The impact of the restructured leadership is seen in the continuing improvements in teaching, learning, behaviour and attendance.

The staff subscribe to the principal's vision and high expectations for the school. This is resulting in morale being high. The performance management and training of teachers are linked appropriately to the Teachers' Standards and students' achievement. These, together with the well-established policies, for example for literacy and supporting disadvantaged students, are leading to improvements in teaching and learning, including in the sixth form.

Recent improvements in the curriculum are improving student progress. These changes include discrete subject lessons in Year 7 rather than topic-based lessons, the introduction of biology, chemistry and physics for all students, and the introduction of two languages for the selective stream students. To support continuity in learning, the new principal is visiting local primary schools.

Following an external review, governors are now holding senior leaders to account more effectively for the standards that students reach. They use a wide range of information, including external reports and data on students' progress, to gain a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They now know the questions to ask to challenge and support the school's improvement. They check that finances, such as the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, are

used effectively to raise achievement. Governors also fulfil their statutory duties, as in ensuring safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

The improving effectiveness of all leaders and managers, together with clear systems and procedures such as those for monitoring the progress of individuals and groups of students, is establishing a culture of raising achievement. This is preparing the school well for its transition to academy status.

### **External support**

The National Leader of Education continues to support effectively the leadership of all aspects of the school. The fact that he is the executive principal of the academy trust that is sponsoring the school to become an academy is helping the smooth transition and promoting continuing improvements. The local authority has provided an external school improvement partner who is supporting the leadership team and governors well in developing their monitoring and evaluation skills.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Improve students' progress more urgently in mathematics and other subjects where it is lagging behind the rate of progress in English, by:
  - developing teachers' skills in adapting the tasks, questions and pace of learning to secure good progress for all students
  - providing more opportunities for students to apply and extend their mathematics skills across subjects.