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22 January 2015

Mr Jonathan Fawcett
Executive headteacher
Alfreton Grange Arts College
Grange Street
Alfreton
DE55 7JA

Dear Mr Fawcett

Special measures monitoring inspection of Alfreton Grange Arts College

Following my visit with Timothy McGuire, Additional Inspector to your school on 20–21 January 2015, 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 fourth 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 per department in mathematics, English and humanities 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of the Interim Executive Board
cc. Local authority
cc. The Secretary of State
cc. The Education Funding Agency (EFA)

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 fourth monitoring inspection on insert date of inspection

Evidence

Inspectors observed students' learning in 14 parts of lessons and visited some classes for shorter periods to observe behaviour and learning. Six observations were jointly carried out with members of the senior leadership team and a subject teacher. Inspectors also observed a school assembly and the quality of provision in the inclusion unit. Students' behaviour and conduct were also observed between lesson times. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, pastoral leaders, subject leaders and the leader in charge of the sixth form. Students, from the main school and sixth form, were spoken with informally in lessons and formally during interviews. Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of students' workbooks with senior leaders. Inspectors also examined a number of school documents in relation to students' achievement and the school's development planning, including external reviews carried out by, and on behalf of, the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been a number of teaching staff changes. At the end of the last academic year, 18 staff left the school, including support staff, mainly teaching assistants and three members of the senior leadership team. From September, 14 teachers joined the school: two in the English department, including one newly-qualified teacher (NQT); four mathematics teachers, including the head of faculty, a lead practitioner and an NQT; four science teachers, including a deputy head of faculty and one NQT; four humanities teachers, including two teacher trainees, one of whom is unqualified. All NQTs were appointed prior to the last monitoring visit. At the end of the autumn term, the head of sixth form and another left the school. One deputy headteacher has been absent since November 2014. The substantive headteacher officially left her post in December 2014.

During the inspection, the executive headteacher was made aware that an Interim Executive Board (IEB) had been appointed by the Department for Education, to take over the governance of the school. The IEB's powers and duties of governance began on day two of the inspection. Inspectors were, therefore, not able to evaluate the effectiveness of governance on this monitoring visit.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Examination results in 2014 were disappointing. They reflected a significant downward turn compared to results in 2013 and were significantly lower than the outcomes predicted by school leaders. From September the executive headteacher, supported by an able deputy executive headteacher, set about establishing clear processes for departments so that they could systematically ensure the reliability of

their students' assessment results. Two sets of assessments were carried out in the autumn term and, following thorough moderation exercises, leaders found them to be reliable. Students are currently working well in most lessons and gaining new knowledge and skills effectively as a result of improved teaching. The school's predictions suggest that a higher proportion of students will achieve the standard measure of 5 or more A*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics. Nevertheless the proportion that does so will remain below current national averages. The proportion of students making expected progress in both English and mathematics is set to reach national averages. Predictions in science are also positive with more than 50% of students set to achieve additional and further additional science qualifications. The school's decision to enter the current Year 11 students early in Year 10 for core science (one part of their full GCSE), may adversely affect overall science results, as only 32% achieved A*-C. Most other subjects predict outcomes which are close to or exceed current national averages. Current assessments for Year 10 show that they are not achieving as well as Year 11; much is still to do to address the legacy of poor teaching these students experienced in Key Stage 3. Subject leaders are aware of this and are taking important steps to train, coach and support teachers to help accelerate students' progress.

Outcomes for students eligible for pupil premium funding are also improving but not rapidly enough. These students are currently three quarters of a grade behind their peers in both English and mathematics. The proportion of disadvantaged students achieving the standard measure of 5 or more A*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is well below that of other students. This gap is of serious concern. Some students were inappropriately placed on courses not leading to level 2 qualifications, despite their ability. This means that they cannot achieve the standards of which they are capable. The progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs is far too slow. The gap in attainment compared to other students is wide. Support for this group of students is not good enough. Leaders have taken urgent steps to address this issue but at this stage it is not clear whether their actions are making a difference. Boys' achievement still lags behind that of girls across the school. A boys-only intervention group has been established and early signs show better engagement in lessons by students who are part of this group.

Students in the sixth form continue to make good progress overall. Current courses match their needs better than previously. This has contributed to better engagement and outcomes. Vocational courses followed by students are more successful than academic A level courses. As a result, leaders have taken the decision to restrict Year 12 courses to only vocational courses, like BTecs. Currently there are plans to share post-16 provision with a neighbouring high performing school, which aims to ensure further successes in the sixth form, wider A Level offer for students and opportunities for teachers to share good practice.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. Training and development activities and non-negotiable directives from senior leaders have contributed to better practice by teachers and better engagement in class by students. The good quality teaching observed was characterised by a range of well-planned learning opportunities based on previous assessments, allowing students of different abilities to achieve well. The quality of marking and feedback is improving. There is greater consistency of practice across departments and students' work is regularly marked. In the mathematics department, standard feedback forms are used, which allow students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and the next steps for improvement. Students told inspectors that they valued the whole school approach to marking, especially the 'Dedicated, Improvement and Reflection Time' (DIRT). Most teachers have established a good learning environment in their classroom where students ask good questions and work well with one another. Leaders acknowledge that more work is still to be done to increase the level of challenge in lessons, so that the most able achieve as well as they can. The science department have ensured regular practical lessons for students; this has been made possible by the employment of full-time science technicians. Students say that they enjoy these lessons.

Inadequate teaching has not been fully eradicated. Some teachers still expect too little of the least-able students and behaviour is not always well-managed. Leaders agree that the current model of placing weaker teachers in classes where there is the greatest level of learning and behavioural need must be changed to ensure that all students have an equal chance to achieve their best.

There are insufficient teaching assistants in the school to offer adequate support in class for vulnerable learners. Leaders have not checked the quality of intervention work adequately to ensure targeted students make the progress they should. School leaders have established new provision to enable discrete literacy and numeracy intervention work to be carried out by teachers and support staff. It is in the early stages of implementation and leaders have not fully evaluated its effectiveness.

The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good. Students make progress because teachers plan engaging activities that motivate and enthuse them. They have also benefited from smaller class sizes and greater individual attention.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most students' attitudes and general conduct continues to be a strong and positive feature of the school. Students told inspectors that they noticed improved behaviour in most of their lessons compared to last year. New behaviour systems were introduced in September creating more clarity for teachers when issuing rewards and sanctions. Punctuality has improved, which some staff and students attribute to the change in the school day. Students' workbooks mostly demonstrate an improved

attitude to learning and higher teacher expectations, compared to last year. However, in a minority of lessons behaviour remains a concern; in these lessons the teachers' ability to manage students' different learning and behaviour needs is weak. In one lesson seen by inspectors, the expectations that the teacher had of students' work and behaviour was too low and consequently no learning took place. Leaders accept that more teacher development work is still needed to embed and sustain good learning behaviours among all students.

Attendance and persistent absence rates remain a serious area of concern. Very little improvement has been made since the section 5 inspection in September 2013. New leaders have taken important steps to address this problem and work undertaken to support targeted families is beginning to have an impact for some students. Fixed term exclusions have risen since September because leaders have implemented strict behaviour codes. A small minority of Year 10 boys, whose behaviour had not been adequately addressed last year, make up a large proportion of the recent exclusions. The recent establishment of an internal exclusion unit is going some way to address the needs of those students with difficult behavioural needs. The school's analysis of data derived from the monitoring and tracking of behaviour are not clear enough. This means that The Interim Executive Board may not have a clear enough picture of the extent of the issues and know where resources should be deployed to support the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher has made a positive difference to many areas of the school. He has brought a much-needed clarity of vision and ethos to the school. Simple unambiguous aims and expectations have helped to galvanise the staff and has contributed to increased consistency of practice. The executive headteacher has led his team of senior leaders well, despite not having his leadership team up to full strength. The recruitment of new staff has helped to energise the school; new recruits, including newly-qualified teachers, have been inducted well; they have helped to provide a positive and stable learning experience for students. Fewer teachers are absent than before. The leadership team enjoys full support from staff.

Improvement planning and self-evaluation demonstrate a clear and honest appraisal of the school's current strengths and weaknesses by leaders. High quality teaching and learning rightly lies at the heart of all training and development activities. Staff benefit from bespoke coaching and mentoring support; currently 14 members of the teaching staff are placed on training programmes. In addition, new and improved data systems have enabled all leaders and teachers to track and monitor the progress of different groups of students. As a result, in a relatively short period of time, leaders have made demonstrable improvements to the quality of teaching across the school.

Subject leaders understand their responsibilities fully. They are increasingly carrying out their monitoring duties more effectively. Leaders of mathematics, English and science show a good understanding of their own department's strengths and weaknesses. They have benefited from collaborative work with a local good school and regional subject networks. Some department leaders in the school do not always ensure that there is consistency in practice among their team. This has contributed to pockets of poor teaching and students' behaviour, which was seen by inspectors and reported by students.

Leaders' work to improve the outcomes of disabled students and those with special educational needs and others in receipt of government funding is not effective enough. In addition, leaders acknowledge that much more work is needed to ensure that students' attendance rates are good.

Previous governance has ensured that statutory requirements for safeguarding students have all been met. An external review of these policies and procedures last term has led to more robust systems and improved understanding by staff as to how to keep students safe. Performance management systems have been reviewed and are much more rigorous. Targets are linked to school priorities and monitored closely. Only strict criteria are used when making decisions about pay progression.

External support

The local authority continues to provide regular and relevant support to the school. Advisory support for the English and science departments has continued this year. They have also commissioned external reviews of pupil premium funding and special educational needs, which have led to clear recommendations; the local authority is committed to help provide the necessary support as suggested in the reports. A full review of the school was conducted last term, which gave a valuable assessment of the progress leaders are making towards the removal of special measures. The local authority has secured the release of a senior leader from another school to join the leadership team whilst one of the deputy headteachers is absent from school. The school also enjoys a close informal partnership with a local high performing school. Senior and subject leaders have benefited from sharing good practice and moderating students' assessments.