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27 February 2015

Mr Andrew Ollson
The Headteacher
The Charles Dickens School
Broadstairs Road
Broadstairs
Kent, CT10 2RL

Dear Mr Ollson

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Charles Dickens School

Following my visit with Elizabeth Smith and Michael Sutherland-Harper, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 25–26 February 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers (NQTs) 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, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in the school by:
 - ensuring students, including those in the sixth form, acquire a secure understanding of key ideas and knowledge in every lesson and in every subject
 - ensuring that all teachers have an accurate and thorough grasp of what students know and understand throughout lessons, and are assessing students' work accurately so they can adjust their teaching as required
 - giving students of different abilities, especially the most able and those who find learning difficult, work that involves appropriate levels of challenge.
- Improve the effectiveness of the leadership of the school by:
 - communicating the school's vision and priorities consistently and clearly, making accurate judgements of the quality of teaching, and providing effective staff training
 - improving how information about how well students are doing is presented, so that middle leaders and other staff are able to use it to help support students' achievement more effectively
 - improving the development plan so it can support school improvement and accountability
 - ensuring that an external review of governance is undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved
 - ensuring that an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium is undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- Improve the progress that all groups of students make in all subjects by:
 - identifying strategies that help students to make rapid and secure progress in some subjects, and sharing this good practice with all staff
 - establishing a clear strategy for the use of the pupil premium and monitoring its impact frequently
 - improving the strategies used to support the achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs to accelerate their progress.
- Improve behaviour and safety by:
 - improving attendance to at least the national average
 - helping students to understand the importance of having positive attitudes to differences between people to address bullying in the school and to prepare students for life in modern day Britain
 - delivering a programme of e-safety in all year groups to help stay students safe on the internet
 - eliminating low-level disruption to lessons.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 February 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, consultant headteacher, governors, staff, a representative from the local authority and four groups of pupils.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the reconstitution of the governing body has been completed and a National Leader of Governance has been appointed to the governing body. A student hub manager has been appointed to coordinate activity across the school for pupil support. External reviews of the use of the pupil premium and of the sixth form have been completed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In November 2014, 87 pupils from Year 11 sat the IGCSE English language examination and 94% achieved grade C or above. As a result, leaders now have additional accurate information regarding pupils' progress. This and other information is being used to target individuals and groups for additional help and support. For example, a significant proportion of Year 11 pupils are engaged in specific online learning programmes to boost their performance in subjects including mathematics and science. The school's own pupil progress information shows that an increased proportion of pupils are now making at least reasonable progress. Scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of lessons demonstrated that rates of progress varied across classes but showed an improving trend. Despite these improvements the gaps between some of the different groups are not closing fast enough.

The quality of teaching

The partnership with another local school is being used effectively to support improvements to teaching and learning. The most recent focus has been on matching tasks and activities to pupils' starting points and capabilities, improving pupils' engagement with learning and marking. The impact of this work can be seen in the improving profile of teaching. All teachers now have useful information about pupils' prior attainment, current progress and their specific learning needs. However, the extent to which teachers use this information to plan lessons and support pupils' learning is too variable. Some examples of good practice were seen. Well-planned lessons resulted in high levels of pupil engagement and good quality learning experiences which led to good progress being made. In the weaker lessons, sufficient account was not taken of the needs and starting points of the different groups of pupils and not enough was done to check pupils' understanding and

readiness to move on. Teachers' marking of pupils' work has improved and helpful advice and guidance are given. However, this is not routinely followed up by all pupils and staff and so does not lead consistently to improvement.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

All staff have undertaken e-safety training and there is a clear understanding of how teachers and other adults can help pupils stay safe online. A new computer based system has been implemented to record and monitor behaviour incidents across the school. Although this system has only recently been introduced, it is already providing school leaders with useful information about patterns of behaviour. There is emerging evidence that this is beginning to reduce instances of low-level inappropriate behaviour in classrooms. Pupils say that behaviour has improved but rewards and sanctions are not applied consistently. Inspectors found that most teachers adhere to the school's revised behaviour policy but that there are exceptions. Exclusions have reduced and are significantly lower than they were at this time last year. Despite the school's best efforts, attendance is not improving rapidly and for some groups it is falling. The proportion of pupils who have poor attendance has reduced slightly but attendance remains a concern. Some parents, carers and pupils raised concerns about bullying. Inspectors investigated these concerns and found that actions taken by the school in response to bullying were appropriate and proportionate. Most pupils who spoke with inspectors say that bullying is not a major concern and they are confident that any bullying that is reported will be dealt with.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Governors have completed the process of reconstituting the governing body. Following an external review of governance, governors have drawn up an action plan to address issues identified by the review and have undertaken training to improve their effectiveness in holding the school to account. Regular challenge meetings are used to hold senior leaders to account for the implementation of the school's action plan and to evaluate its impact.

Middle leaders feel that the new leadership structure provides better channels of communication and clearer lines of accountability. Arrangements for setting targets for staff have not been completed and the lack of precise targets makes it more difficult for leaders to hold staff to account. The previous inspection required the school to commission an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium. This review has recently been completed and the school is awaiting the report. Two reviews of sixth form provision have been completed. The focus of these reviews was primarily to explore the appropriateness of the sixth form provision. The school is aware that sixth form provision does not currently meet the needs and aspirations of the students as well as it might.

Regular monitoring of teaching and learning ensure that senior leaders have a clear picture of what is working and what needs further improvement. Inspectors conducted joint observations of lessons with school staff. There was general agreement about the quality of learning that was observed. However, in a few cases the school's evaluation of what was seen was overgenerous because the focus had been on the activity of the teacher, rather than on the impact of the teaching on pupils' learning.

Provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is being reviewed to identify aspects that need improvement. Pupils' needs are being clearly identified so that teachers can plan to meet those needs more effectively. These processes are still at an early stage of development.

The school has used partnerships with other schools to moderate judgements on pupils' achievements. This has ensured that the school has accurate and reliable information about how well pupils are performing.

External support

The local authority has continued to support the school in monitoring the impact of the actions taken to address the weaknesses identified by the previous inspection. A local authority officer makes regular visits to the school to assist with monitoring and evaluation of progress. Additional support has been provided by the local authority, including governor services, e-safety training and attendance and behaviour support. Effective partnerships have been formed with other schools to help with aspects of the school's improvement plan. All of the above support is helping the school to improve.