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Mr Dean Coombes
Headteacher
Deansfield Community School, Specialists In Media Arts
Deans Road
Wolverhampton
WV1 2BH

Dear Mr Coombes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Deansfield Community School, Specialists In Media Arts

Following my visit with Alicia Welsh-Kuligowicz, Additional Inspector, to your school on 18–19 March 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 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 June 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.
- The school must contact the monitoring Her Majesty's Inspector to discuss and agree any plans it might have to appoint newly qualified teachers to specific departments 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 Wolverhampton.

Yours sincerely

Gwendoline Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, so that it is at least good for all students by making sure that all teachers:
 - make accurate assessments of the levels students are working at, especially at Key Stage 3
 - match work to the different ability levels in their class so that it is neither too easy nor too difficult for students especially those on school action
 - regularly tell students how they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work
 - help students to improve their literacy and communication skills through telling them about errors in spelling or grammar and supporting them to improve their handwriting.

- Make sure all students make at least good progress, so that the standards they reach, particularly in English and mathematics, are sustained at a level which is at least equal to national averages by ensuring that:
 - the work that is planned for students in Key Stage 3 recognises what students can already do and builds on this
 - students are given opportunities to develop their skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics and to use these in other subjects
 - students who receive support from teaching assistants or other adults are not reliant on this support but develop their ability to think really hard about their work.

- Improve leadership so that all students achieve well by:
 - making sure that all students receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum and religious education, and that school leaders recruit subject specialist teachers to teach humanities subjects
 - providing support for all students who have weak literacy skills so that they are identified early, and an effective support programme is quickly put into place
 - carrying out frequent checks on the quality of the school's work by observing teaching more frequently and using information on the progress made by students to inform judgements on the quality of teaching over time
 - developing a more effective system for checking on the progress being made by students, so that clear information can be provided to school leaders to enable them to identify and take action where progress is slow
 - making sure there is a school improvement plan which has been shared with all staff and which is regularly updated
 - ensuring that pupil premium and Year 7 catch up funding are having a sustained effect on improving progress for the students who are entitled to these resources.

- Continue to build on the improvements that have already been seen in attendance to ensure it remains above the national average by:

- monitoring closely the attendance of all students including groups such as disabled students and those who have special educational needs or who are supported by pupil premium funding
- working more closely with parents, carers and external agencies.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18–19 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and school improvement adviser commissioned by the local authority. Parts of 22 lessons were observed, some jointly with senior leaders. In addition inspectors visited a form period and an assembly, and observed students around the school at the start of the day and during break and lunch times.

Context

No significant changes to staffing or the school's status have taken place since the previous monitoring visit.

Achievement of pupils at the school

More students are now making the progress they should. Students' achievement in mathematics is improving but it still lags well behind achievement in English. While gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged students eligible for pupil premium funding and other students are narrowing, and have almost closed in some year groups in English, in general they are still too wide. Planning for Key Stage 3 is beginning to take more account of what students can do when they arrive in Year 7. Although this is still developing, the progress of students in Years 7 and 8 is improving. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are beginning to improve as a result of a stronger focus on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where there is now far more emphasis on the application of methods learned to real-life contexts.

The quality of teachers' planning has improved and all teachers are now expected to match work to pupils' different ability levels. Inspection evidence suggests that this is now being done consistently. Where learning is strong, lessons consist of well-structured activities that are appropriately pitched to enable students to fully participate in learning. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations and challenging activities stretch students and enable them to make good progress. However, where learning is weak, the most able students, in particular, are not provided with sufficient challenge to stretch and develop their understanding.

The school is working well with a number of other schools to improve the accuracy of assessment, including by jointly checking students' work. In particular, there is a greater focus on improving the accuracy of assessment in Key Stage 3.

A significant improvement is apparent in the marking of students' work. Students know their targets and marking now consistently informs them about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work further, including spelling and grammar. Teachers ensure students have opportunities to use this advice to correct and improve their work. Evidence indicates that this is leading to improvement in the quality of students' written work.

Lesson activities regularly promote the development of students' literacy skills. However, this tends to be mainly in terms of written work, with less emphasis on the development of oral communication skills. Teachers often ask questions skilfully to assess students' basic knowledge, but not so well to develop their oral skills. For example, students are not regularly encouraged to answer in sentences or to develop their higher-order thinking skills.

Where learning is strongest, students take responsibility for making sure they learn well and demonstrate strong skills of both independent and collaborative learning. However, not all teachers have high enough expectations of students' behaviour for learning during lessons. As a result, not all expect or get silence and attentiveness when they speak to students or when other students answer questions in lessons. Similarly, not all teachers ensure that students get on with their work promptly when asked to do so or take action to re-engage any students whose attention wanders.

Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to plan interesting lessons and to give clear explanations. Where learning is strong, teachers correct misunderstandings and provide additional information to ensure students remain focused on the task. However, while many lessons include interesting and sometimes exciting activities, these do not always translate into effective learning. Where learning is weakest, this is often because activities and expectations of students and the learning that will take place are not clearly defined.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Safeguarding arrangements meet national requirements. Students feel safe in school and understand how to keep themselves safe.

A range of new strategies are in place to improve attendance and behaviour. This includes the development of a reward system and individual targets for attendance and behaviour. In addition, the school is developing its on-site provision as an alternative to off-site provision in order to encourage attendance further and is working closely with the attendance officer and parents to reduce the number of persistent absentees.

Although students' attitudes to their work and their conduct in lessons and around the school are sometimes good, this is not the case among enough students or in enough lessons or other situations. The fact that not all teachers manage behaviour well enough compounds this situation.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school's leaders are raising expectations and driving improvement. They want students to achieve well and are absolutely committed to improving the school. They are strongly supported by the staff.

Teaching is now being observed more regularly. Leaders, including middle leaders, now take into account the progress students are making, including that evident in their work, when judging teaching over time. Helpful initiatives to raise the quality of teaching and learning include encouraging teachers to work in small collaborative groups to plan and review their own practice. These are at an early stage of development and leaders are aware of the need to monitor and evaluate them to ensure they make an effective contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Monitoring and analysis are improving generally. Systems to check and track students' progress, in order to provide leaders with clear information about underachievement and thus where support is needed, are developing but still need refining. The comprehensive data available about achievement and behaviour is not yet in a format that allows leaders at all levels to evaluate the impact of strategies and to identify strengths and weaknesses easily and regularly, and thus to take sufficiently prompt action.

A school improvement plan is now in place and is regularly updated. The plan is comprehensive and focuses clearly on the areas for improvement noted in the last inspection report. Leaders recognise the importance of undertaking rigorous and accurate self-evaluation at whole-school and individual subject level, and this is something they are currently working on.

Improvements have been made to the curriculum, including the introduction of formal religious education lessons and the use of subject specialist humanities teachers. Curriculum developments are ongoing.

Improvements to support the development of students' literacy skills have been introduced and are beginning to have a positive impact. They include the testing and monitoring of reading ages, the introduction of Fiction Fridays, and literacy support in form tutor periods. These and other strategies require further refinement and thorough evaluation to ensure they have sufficient impact.

The external review of governance was timely and effective. As a result, a strong governing body is now challenging and advising leaders effectively. The use of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding has been reviewed so that it more effectively supports eligible students.

External support

External support is helping the school to improve. The headteacher has been proactive in developing a wide range of links with other schools in order to learn from their good practice. This includes supporting individual subject departments as well as whole-school issues such as leadership, assessment, appraisal and inclusion. The school improvement adviser commissioned by the local authority is providing leaders with valuable advice and helpful monitoring activities. Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the local authority has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.