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22 May 2015

Mr Graeme Smith
Head of School
Alfreton Grange Arts College
Grange Street
Alfreton
DE55 7JA

Dear Mr Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of Alfreton Grange Arts College

Following my visit with Jayne Ashman, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Jonathan Gardiner, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20–21 May 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 fifth 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 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of the Governing Body
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 fifth monitoring inspection on 20–21 May 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed students' learning across the main school and visited some classes for shorter periods to observe behaviour and learning. Nearly all observations were jointly carried out with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors observed a school assembly and the quality of provision in the internal inclusion unit. Students' behaviour and conduct were also observed between lesson times. Meetings were held with the head of school, assistant headteachers, the coordinator for special educational needs (SENCO), pastoral leaders and subject leaders for English and mathematics. The lead inspector interviewed the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, representatives from the Torch Academy Gateway Trust (TAGT), and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors spoke with students 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 behaviour, the school's development planning, and meetings of the interim executive board. They evaluated the school's single central register and child protection policies.

During this inspection, the quality of teaching in the sixth form was not evaluated because too many students in this part of the school were involved in examinations or on study leave.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the temporary executive headteacher left the school. The deputy headteacher was appointed as head of school. One member of the teaching staff has left the school. The school has appointed a new head of faculty for science, who will commence their employment from September 2015. An assistant headteacher in charge of teaching has been appointed; he will take up his position on 1 July. Two members of the support staff and one member of the teaching staff are currently absent long term. The interim executive board has been fully established. The interim executive board has appointed the Torch Academy Gateway Trust to act as the educational partner to the school. The interim executive board have taken the decision to suspend enrolment into the sixth form from September 2015 and have begun consultation with parents to extend the school day from next term.

The school is currently undergoing a consultation process to become an academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's achievement data show that many more Year 11 students are set to attain five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics than last year.

However, the proportion on track to achieve this standard is still below current national averages, despite this year group being more able than the national average. Students' progress in English and mathematics is improving but there are too few students that are exceeding their expected progress. Students' achievement in most subjects is forecast to improve compared to last year but achievement in science is still not good enough. Only a third of the cohort is expected to achieve two or more GCSEs in science. Gaps in students' knowledge and skills resulting from previously poor teaching in science have not been addressed effectively enough.

Students eligible for pupil premium funding are making more rapid progress than other students. Work to support disadvantaged students is becoming increasingly effective.

Of greatest concern is the persistent underachievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Provision to support their needs has been poor for far too long. The school continues to seriously let these students down.

Boys continue to underachieve. The gap between their achievement and that of girls is still wide and shows little sign of improvement. The range of strategies recently employed in English and mathematics have not had time to make a significant difference to the boys' progress.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching across the school continues to be too variable. Too many lessons are not well planned and do not enable students to make good progress, especially the least able. While teachers now have access to a wide range of information about students' progress and individual learning needs, they do not always use this information effectively to devise appropriate and engaging learning tasks.

Despite work to improve the quality of teaching across the school, leaders have not eliminated inadequate teaching. Too many students still have to endure poorly taught lessons on a regular basis in some subjects. Teaching in science is not always good. Some students in Key Stage 4 say that they have learnt very little and feel very unsure about the course they are following and ill-prepared for the exams they are due to sit.

The quality of marking and feedback is increasingly becoming more consistent. Most teachers adhere to the school policy and mark students' work regularly, but often feedback is not very helpful. Students, however, appreciate the time they are given to reflect on their marked work. Inspectors saw some effective marking in English, mathematics and humanities.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' conduct around the school is polite and courteous. Inspectors witnessed no poor behaviour around the school site. Attitudes in lessons are variable. Most students are cooperative and compliant. They work well with one another and mostly follow teachers' instruction well. However, a small minority of students shout out in class and are not attentive. This behaviour is invariably related to poorer quality of teaching.

Behaviour records show that behaviour incidents in lessons have reduced and work in students' books shows that they are taking more pride in their work than previously. Students say that their lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour and, if they are, it is by a small number of persistent offenders. Most students respect the new rules and welcome the school's more strict approach to poor behaviour.

Attendance to school shows little sign of improvement since the last inspection. Similarly, the proportion of those absent more regularly (15% or more of the time) is not getting better. Signs of improvement seen early on in the year have not been sustained. Fixed-term exclusions have also increased due to the school's enforcement of its stricter behaviour policy. More worrying, however, is the fact that boys and students who have special educational needs are still disproportionately represented in exclusion figures.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Parents and students have been rightly concerned by the lack of continuity of leadership in the school over the last few years. The interim executive board, made up of experienced, educational professionals, has made important and astute decisions to secure the long-term future of the school. It has assured the continuity of day-to-day leadership through the appointment of the head of school, who was the previous deputy headteacher. In addition, it has contracted the services of the Torch Academy Gateway Trust, which has a notably good track record, to provide educational support to the school for the next two years. This process has taken time. As a result, the original timescales for the school to come out of special measures have inevitably been delayed.

The head of school has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school but has not devised a clear enough plan to ensure rapid improvements. For example, there is still no coherent strategic plan to address boys' underachievement. He is supported by assistant headteachers, who are also committed and passionate about improving the school, but equally inexperienced. The interim executive board has recognised this inexperience and has employed some external consultancy support for the head of school and the leadership team.

Leaders have not provided staff with sufficient exposure to outstanding practitioners. This, and weaker training and development provision since January, have contributed to greater inconsistency in teaching. Inadequate teaching still exists. Serious concerns, raised previously about the weak provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, have not been addressed robustly enough.

The leaders of mathematics and English continue to improve their leadership skills. They have contributed to greater consistency in practice in their departments, and monitoring activities are carried out regularly. However, subject leadership across the school is not strong enough. There is insufficient opportunity for middle leaders to share good practice and they are not always being held to account strongly enough by senior leaders. Staffing and leadership instability in science have meant that poor outcomes have not been reversed quickly enough. Students are still not always following appropriate science courses.

Leaders' impact on the behaviour of students is making a difference. There is generally a calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school. However, they have not been effective in reducing absence and exclusion rates.

All leaders acknowledge that there is still much more work to be done in the school to ensure that it no longer requires special measures and becomes a good school.

External support

The head of school receives valuable support for one day a week from the headteacher of a good school in the neighbouring local authority. The Torch Academy Gateway Trust, as well as supporting the leadership team in an advisory capacity, has put together plans to support a new and coherent curriculum structure for September. The local authority has been supportive of the new leadership of the school. It has complemented the support provided by the Torch Academy Gateway Trust by providing consultancy advice for key departments, including the science department. This support has led to some improvements but these have not been rapid enough to ensure better outcomes for students.