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4 June 2015

Mr M Williams  
Headteacher  
The Corsham School  
The Tynings  
Corsham  
SN13 9DF

Dear Mr Williams

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Corsham School**

Following my visit with Simon Rowe, Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 2 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The inspection also focused on relevant aspects of the quality of leadership and management (including governance) at the academy.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors met with you and other senior leaders, groups of students, the governor with responsibility for the pupil premium and some teaching and support staff. Inspectors also scrutinised the single central record of safeguarding checks, the academy's self-evaluation and action plans, anonymised records of teachers' performance and documents relating to the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged students. They observed 14 part-lessons jointly with senior leaders and looked at the students' books during the lessons.

### **Context**

The academy is much larger than most secondary schools and has a large sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals, at 19%, is below average. The proportion identified as having special educational needs is broadly average. Students are predominantly of White British heritage. While most students start in Year 7 and remain in the school, a small minority of children,

mainly from service families, enter and leave in other years. The school converted to academy status in 2011.

## **Main findings**

You, the governors, the senior leaders and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to raising the achievement of disadvantaged students. This is evident in the effective intervention and teaching strategies that are being implemented. The strategies are informed by rigorous monitoring of the students' academic progress, behaviour and attendance. The impact of the provision is seen in the improving trends in these three areas across Years 7 to 9. The progress of disadvantaged students in Years 10 and 11 is slower as previous interventions were not specific enough to meet their individual needs. You have ensured that the progress of these students is now a key priority for all teachers through your performance management arrangements.

The academy's information on the attainment of disadvantaged students at Key Stage 4 indicates that it is broadly in line with that of disadvantaged students nationally, although below that of other students nationally and in the school. However, the students with low prior attainment are not progressing at the same rate in English as similar students nationally and as other students in the school. These students make better progress in mathematics. Through observations of lessons, the students' work and discussions with them, it is evident that weak literacy skills are a barrier to their learning and progress in many lessons. The reading and spelling ages of a minority of Year 7 students are especially low.

Particular weaknesses in literacy for the disadvantaged students with low prior attainment include a limited vocabulary, few strategies for spelling and disjointed handwriting. The students find it hard to keep up with others in the lesson and this lowers their self-esteem. They also find homework that involves research difficult because they do not understand the words. The school provides a homework club to help the students with their research. Teachers' marking includes guidance on improving the work. However, this does not sufficiently address the students' weaknesses in literacy skills.

The introduction of additional English lessons taught by a subject specialist specifically for low-achieving students in Years 7 and 8 is effective in helping them to organise their writing. In addition, the recent implementation of a reading programme for these students is encouraging them to read more widely. Sixth form students also listen to the students reading. These effective strategies are helping the low-achieving disadvantaged students to catch up with others.

Effective transition arrangements with local primary schools help the academy to identify the needs of disadvantaged students early. The summer school provided jointly by the academy and the local authority Family Learning team supports the transition of the most vulnerable students and their families well. You have wisely appointed an adviser to engage parents and carers who find it difficult to work with the school so that they can support their children's education.

The disadvantaged students say they learn best in lessons that are well structured with clear expectations and where teachers do not talk for too long as it is difficult to recall a lot of information. They say that expectations are very clear in physical education lessons. They value teachers' marking, as in the subject of history, which helps them to know what to do precisely to improve their work. Published data indicate that they make good progress in history.

The students say their targets are not high enough in some subjects. The school's data indicate that in some subjects, such as English, the students are on track to reach their targets but will not make the progress expected of similar students nationally. This suggests that the targets are not high enough and that they lower teachers' expectations of what the disadvantaged students can achieve.

Most lessons stretch and challenge the most able disadvantaged students well. However, not all teachers are checking the progress of disadvantaged students and using different strategies to help them when they do not understand as quickly as others in the class.

The disadvantaged students are eager to learn and they demonstrate very positive attitudes to lessons. The academy's monitoring of their attendance shows an improving trend. The students say they feel safe in school. They value the support the academy provides for their personal development, including personal education plans for some students. Case studies of students indicate that the academy's work is successful in helping students with challenging behaviour to manage it effectively. This work is contributing to a significant reduction in exclusions.

Almost all disadvantaged students remain in education or go on to employment or an apprenticeship. This is an improving trend over time and is supported by the provision of college courses and extended work experience for students who benefit from a vocational route during Key Stage 4. It is also supported by the mentoring programme for students in Key Stage 4 and by the appointment of a careers adviser.

The governors hold senior leaders to account for the pupil premium by challenging the cost of initiatives in relation to their impact. As a result, some less successful strategies have been discontinued and action plans are becoming more focused on addressing the specific needs of disadvantaged students.

### **External support**

The academy is involved in a pupil premium project provided by Ofsted and the local authority. This has raised the status of disadvantaged students in the school. For example, the students are the first to receive academic mentoring by year group tutors and their books are the first to be marked by teachers. The academy is beginning to share best practice with other schools in the project.

**The strengths in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- a strong commitment by the headteacher, governors, senior leaders and staff to raise the achievement of disadvantaged students as demonstrated in teachers' performance management
- effective transition arrangements with primary schools to support the early identification of the students' specific needs
- rigorous monitoring and evaluation of disadvantaged students' academic progress, attendance and behaviour
- effective support to improve the literacy skills of disadvantaged students in Key Stage 3
- effective mentoring, careers advice and, where appropriate, vocational courses for students in Key Stage 4
- the very positive attitudes to learning demonstrated by the disadvantaged students
- governors who challenge the cost and impact of initiatives funded by the pupil premium.

**The weaknesses in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- academic progress targets that are not aspirational or regularly reviewed and which lower teachers' expectations of disadvantaged students' achievement
- teachers' skills in checking the progress of disadvantaged students and adapting the lessons to enable them to keep up with the other students
- insufficient support in literacy for disadvantaged students in Key Stage 4.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Raise teachers' expectations of what disadvantaged students can achieve through regularly reviewing and setting more aspirational progress targets.
- Develop teachers' skills in checking the progress of disadvantaged students and adapting the lessons to speed up their progress, particularly in Key Stage 4.

- Extend the focus on developing disadvantaged students' literacy skills across all year groups and reinforce them in all subject lessons, paying particular attention to vocabulary, spelling and handwriting.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Wiltshire, to the Secretary of State for Education and to the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**