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5 June 2015

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

Dear Mr Olsson

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Charles Dickens School

Following my visit with Theresa Phillips, Her Majesty's Inspector, Janet Pearce, Her Majesty's Inspector and Evelyn Riley, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3–4 June 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 third 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 no more than two 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 Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

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 to help middle leaders and other staff use it to 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, addressing bullying in the school and preparing students for life in modern day Britain
 - delivering a programme of e-safety in all year groups to help students stay safe on the internet
 - eliminating low-level disruption to lessons.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3–4 June 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 two groups of pupils. Inspectors also reviewed a sample of work from pupils in Years 7–9.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the last inspection.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There has been a general improvement in pupils' achievement since the last visit and although some gaps between the different groups are closing, they remain too wide. The school's forecast for Year 11 GCSE outcomes this summer indicates that it does not expect to reach its targets and less than half the pupils will achieve five good quality GCSE grades, including mathematics and English. In almost half of the lessons that were seen, pupils' achievement was judged to be good. The school's assessment information and evidence from pupils' books shows that a significant minority of pupils at Key Stage 3 are making less than expected progress and will not meet their individual end of year targets. The proportion of pupils who are likely to make good progress by the end of the school year is very low. Standards in English are better than those in mathematics and pupils who get additional help in English make good progress.

The quality of teaching

Many teachers are not making effective use of the helpful information available to them about pupils' prior attainment, current progress and their specific learning needs. Consequently, in too many lessons the tasks and activities are not set at the right level for the different groups of pupils. Teachers' planning does not accurately reflect the rate at which children should learn, and in many cases expectations of what pupils can do in the lesson and over time are too low. Although some effective marking was seen, overall the quality remains inconsistent and there was little evidence that, despite the opportunities given, pupils had not responded to or acted on teachers' advice. In a few instances, teachers moved on too quickly without checking that pupils had understood, and errors and misconceptions were not picked up quickly enough.

In the most effective lessons, teachers provided a variety of well-structured activities which were appropriate for the level at which the pupils were working. Different levels of challenge ensured that pupils did not have to wait while others caught up and they were given challenging periods of time to complete the tasks, which kept

them focused on what they need to do. In these lessons, teachers used skilful questioning to help pupils develop their understanding and closely monitored each group so that all made good progress. Additional materials were also available to support pupils who needed extra help. Although teaching has improved since the last visit, not enough teaching is consistently good to ensure that all pupils make the progress that they should.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attendance has shown an improving trend since the last visit and more pupils are achieving 100% attendance. The proportion of pupils who have consistently poor attendance is decreasing but remains well above the national average. Pupils say that the rewards the school offers for good attendance are encouraging some pupils to attend more regularly. The school analyses closely the attendance of the different groups of pupils but has not compared the attendance of these groups with the attendance of similar groups nationally. Fewer pupils are late to school but a small number have poor attitudes regarding lateness to lessons. Behaviour around the school and in lessons has continued to improve. Most pupils are receptive and generally ready and willing to learn. Pupils say that behaviour in lessons is very dependent on the attitude of the teacher. The school's analysis of the issuing of behaviour slips, which are issued when a behaviour incident occurs, shows that some subject areas issue far more slips than others. Observation of lessons confirms that the thresholds which trigger a behaviour slip are not uniform or consistent. For example, in some lessons teachers will talk over low-level chatter while in other lessons the teacher will insist that pupils are silent while other people are speaking to the class. Exclusions have continued to fall and fewer pupils are now involved in exclusions and fewer days are lost through exclusion. Pupils say the school council is not effective and many feel they have no say in decisions that are made about the future of the school. A recent survey conducted after a Year 7 consultation evening showed that parents and carers who responded to the survey were much more positive about behaviour and safety than those who responded to a similar survey last year.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Arrangements for setting targets for staff have been partly completed but the lack of precise targets, incomplete job descriptions and unclear lines of accountability make it challenging to hold staff properly to account. Plans for the next cycle of target setting are well advanced and the process is expected to be completed before the next monitoring visit in the autumn. The school's recent self-evaluation focused on improvements which had been made rather than the school's overall effectiveness and as a result its judgement was over generous. Inspectors judged that, despite improvements, there remains much to do before the school can be considered to provide an adequate standard of education for all its pupils. The school has

implemented a variety of systems and procedures to aid improvement but these are not yet having sufficient impact on accelerating pupils' progress because of inconsistencies in the way they are being adopted. Staff who have leadership and management responsibilities are not rigorous enough in ensuring that the non-negotiable elements of new practices are being adhered to consistently well. Governors are beginning to ask more searching questions and are now better informed about some aspects of the school's work. They recognise that further development is needed before they can become fully effective in holding the school to account and have a more strategic role in driving improvement.

Improvements have been made to the curriculum but some elements, which are intended to help prepare pupils for life in modern Britain, are not convincing and this area of the curriculum does not have any particular person to coordinate and evaluate the impact of the various activities.

The school has begun to act on the recommendations of the external review on sixth form provision. Entry requirements have been changed to improve students' chances of success in the various courses. There are plans to offer a different mix of courses which are considered more appropriate for those pupils who want to stay on in the sixth form. The school expects sixth form results this summer to be better than last year. The head of sixth form has not been required to evaluate sixth form provision and governors are not as well informed about this part of the school.

External support

The local authority has continued to monitor the impact of the actions taken to address the weaknesses identified by the previous inspection. Regular visits by a link officer have helped leaders keep on track with planned actions and have given them additional suggestions to aid improvement. Other support has been provided by a more thorough evaluation of leadership capacity. The partnerships with other local schools have continued to support the development of teaching and learning and improving capacity at middle leadership level.