17 June 2015

Ms S Hartle
Acting Principal
Cockshut Hill Technology College
Cockshut Hill
Birmingham
B26 2HX

Dear Ms Hartle

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cockshut Hill Technology College

Following my visit to your school on 15–16 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 making reasonable 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 the Governing Body, the Executive Principal of Ninestiles Academy and the Director of Children’s Services for Birmingham.
Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty’s Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address: CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

■ Improve the quality of teaching by:
  – eliminating all inadequate teaching and reducing that which requires improvement
  – ensuring feedback on teaching by senior leaders is accurate and gives teachers a clear idea about how they can improve
  – making sure teachers’ planning consistently takes account of pupils’ different starting points
  – checking that all teachers mark students’ work regularly and provide feedback which gives students clear guidance on how to improve
  – enabling students to make good progress in reading by teaching them the skills they need to tackle unfamiliar words
  – providing teachers with training to improve their questioning skills and marking
  – deploying additional adults more effectively to help support the learning and progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

■ Raise the achievement of all groups of students, especially those who are eligible for free school meals, are disabled or have special educational needs, by ensuring that:
  – information about current and predicted GCSE grades for students is reliable
  – teachers have consistently high expectations of students’ achievement
  – progress of students at Key Stage 3 is given a higher priority.

■ Improve the behaviour and safety of students by:
  – ensuring that all staff show their clear expectations of good behaviour in lessons and around school through applying the behaviour policy consistently
  – developing effective strategies to reduce the need to exclude students, particularly those who are excluded on more than one occasion
  – taking action to increase the level of attendance more rapidly, particularly for disabled students and those with special educational needs.

■ Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
  – ensuring that the curriculum takes full account of students’ different abilities and interests so that they are fully involved in their learning and able to make rapid progress
  – checking rigorously that teachers use data on students’ achievement to plan the next steps in learning for all groups of students in their classes
  – setting challenging targets for all staff so that they can be held to account for the progress their students make
  – ensuring that pupil premium funding is used effectively to close the gap in attainment between those students known to be eligible for free school meals and other students
– ensuring that governors are better informed and trained so they can hold
leaders to account for the performance of the school
– drawing on leadership support from outstanding and good schools.
Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 15–16 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school’s work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal and other senior and middle managers, the executive principal of Ninestiles academy, the deputy director of education for Birmingham City Council, the Chair of the Governing Body, the director of the East Birmingham Network alternative provision team, and a group of Year 10 students. The inspector visited parts of 13 lessons jointly with senior leaders, looked at the work of students, analysed the school’s information on students’ attainment and progress, and scrutinised formal minutes of the monitoring task force group that is overseeing the school’s improvement.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in March 2015, the local authority, with the agreement of the Regional Schools Commissioner, has submitted a formal proposal to the Department for Education for Ninestiles Academy Trust to sponsor the school. There have been 85 in-year admissions of students to the school since January 2015. Some of these students have recently arrived in the United Kingdom and are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The academic attainment of students is steadily improving for all year groups. The progress of different groups of students is also improving, according to the school’s own assessment information, although not yet strongly enough for the most-able students. In Year 11, students eligible for the pupil premium are still about a grade behind other students, but both groups are achieving better than last year’s students at the same stage. In earlier year groups, that gap is reducing. Students learning English as an additional language are making good progress in relation to their starting points, leading to higher-than-expected attainment in mathematics and science. Students’ exercise books show that most students take a pride in their work, respond to advice, and write extensively in many subjects.

The quality of teaching

Inadequate teaching over time has been virtually eliminated through constructive performance monitoring and well-targeted professional development for staff. School leaders judge that the majority of teaching over time is now good. A number of temporary and supply staff are still required at the school, but permanent staffing for September 2015 is expected to be complete except for one post in mathematics.

In the lessons seen during this monitoring visit, the inspector noted a consistent approach to marking and feedback to students. In the better practice, students were
captivated by the content of the lesson, triggering their curiosity, as shown by their questions to the teacher. Not every lesson managed to generate that high level of student engagement. This was because the lesson content was itself not particularly interesting, or because students did not get long enough to complete a task by themselves before the teacher interrupted their learning with the next activity. Teachers plan activities aimed at meeting the different learning needs and abilities of students and groups of students. In some examples, students themselves make decisions on the level of difficulty they wish to attempt. Their choices are carefully monitored by the teacher, resulting in effective progress and a sense of satisfaction by students of mastering tasks they find challenging. The overall impact of this approach is to raise academic demand, particularly for the most able; for example, in mathematics.

**Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The school is now calm, clean and tidy as everyone is trying to help improve behaviour and students’ attitudes. Students are confident that staff are available to talk to should students have a concern, but are not yet universally convinced that school is enjoyable. The majority of students are pleased with the positive impact of *Behaviour for Learning*, which is the name of the recently introduced behaviour management policy. Most teachers use it consistently, but not yet everyone, especially teachers new to the school. Students note that some staff jump too quickly to the ‘sanctions’ without providing a verbal warning. There are still relatively large numbers of students getting detentions each week. This shows that, as yet, low-level disruption is not rare. There are still relatively high numbers of fixed-term exclusions. Nevertheless, students’ attendance is improving and is broadly average.

The school has recently set up a house system and vertical (mixed-age) tutor groups as the next step to introducing a much-needed student rewards system, and to give students more opportunities to take on responsibilities. These steps are intended to develop a greater sense of initiative and commitment to learning from some students. However, as yet, the majority of students are content to just comply with instructions, and do not press forward as fast as they can with their learning.

**The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Strong leadership by the acting principal and executive principal is leading to better teaching and learning across the school. Middle leaders are confident, now, that the achievement of students is securely improving, and are playing a full part in developing the quality of teaching in their faculties. Teachers have higher expectations and the curriculum is now predominantly academic. Interventions to support students falling behind are working and are popular with these students.

However, the delay over securing the strategic future of the school has hampered or postponed the work of the governing body to revise the organisation of the
leadership and management. This is necessary to accommodate the loss of sixth form and a revised curriculum, to tackle the unusually high proportion of budget spent on support staff, and to deal with falling student rolls. There have been a number of teaching staff resignations. This has helped in reducing projected overall salary costs but, until a new staffing structure is established, recruitment of specialist replacement staff is on hold. In this uncertain context, recruitment of new governors has proven difficult, and the current make-up of the governing body makes it difficult to set up staff redundancy and appeals committees, given that many governors have recent close links with the school.

The allocation of pupil premium funding is carefully recorded, with an evaluation of its impact taking place as this academic year is completed. Almost all students eligible for the pupil premium have attended specific additional Year 11 revision classes. The school has strengthened its links with the East Birmingham Network (EBN) area ‘Alternative Provision’ team, with nine students at the EBN Free School, and a further five at three other providers. The school is relentless at tracking down students who appear to have left the school. It does not remove them from roll until another agency formally provides written confirmation that the student is now under new supervision. At present, there is one student and family who have not yet been located at their new location in Bradford by Bradford Social Services.

**External support**

Ninestiles Academy continues to provide the seconded acting principal and assistant principal, the part-time head of mathematics and the strategic oversight of the executive principal. This practical school improvement support is commissioned by the local authority, and is effective. There has been no additional local authority involvement beyond participation by officers in monitoring task force meetings, and the production of a report on long-term financial prospects based on pupil number predictions. The contract with the local authority is due to end in August 2015, but the local authority is confident that approval for academy conversion is now likely; they will ensure continuity by extending the contract with Ninestiles from August, pending that conversion.