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30 November 2015

Mr Chris Gray
Headteacher
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Nookside
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mr Gray

Special measures monitoring inspection of Grindon Hall Christian School

Following my visit with Julie McGrane, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 November 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 November 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and the 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 Executive Director of People's Services for Sunderland.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality and impact of leaders, managers and governance, including in the sixth form, by:
 - setting more ambitious targets for what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring there is a consistent approach to tracking pupils' achievements across each key stage
 - monitoring the performance of staff more frequently so they are held to account for their work and understand the link between the quality of their teaching, the progress made by pupils and the rewards available through their pay
 - developing the skills of middle leaders so they can take a full and active role in planning, implementing and evaluating improvements to pupils' progress
 - implementing a broad and balanced approach to the curriculum that exploits all opportunities, including assemblies and form time, to teach pupils about the fundamental British values they will need to live in modern Britain
 - make sure recruitment procedures are fair, open and transparent; secure the very best people for the job and ensure good value for money
 - ensuring the outcomes of the pupil premium and governance reviews are implemented rapidly so that there is appropriate and effective oversight of the school's work.
- Ensure all pupils feel and are kept safe and are well-prepared for life in modern Britain by:
 - ensuring all staff comply with the requirements of the school's health and safety policy
 - analysing incidents of poor behaviour and bullying so that the root cause of this conduct is understood, acted upon quickly and leads to a reduction in the number of exclusions and repeated incidents
 - implementing an effective programme of personal development, including sex and relationships education, so that pupils have a forum to raise issues, discuss the risks to which they may be exposed and feel better prepared to make important decisions in later life
 - raising pupils' awareness of equality and diversity in Britain today so that they are respectful and tolerant to those who belong to different faiths, cultures and communities.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables all pupils, especially those who are most able, to be challenged in their learning and reach their full potential, by:
 - ensuring teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - planning lessons that take account of what pupils already know and can do so that they are fully challenged in their learning, interested in their work and willing to respond to teachers' questions
 - providing enough time for pupils to reflect and respond to questions, ensuring teachers take account of pupils' responses to adapt the lesson where necessary and address any misunderstandings
 - sharing the best aspects of marking and feedback in the primary phase across the wider school, ensuring there is enough time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to write at length and solve mathematical problems in a range of subjects and contexts
 - ensuring children in the early years have greater opportunity to develop their learning through a range of activities they can choose for themselves, including in the outdoor environment
 - ensuring those pupils resitting their GCSEs in the sixth form are adequately supported to achieve a better grade.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including one act of collective worship, and scrutinised documents. They also met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, individual and groups of parents, and members of the governing body. They observed a range of lessons across the school. Six of these were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors spoke with a group of Key Stage 3 pupils and with a group of Year 11 and Year 12 pupils about their work and experience of school. They also scrutinised a range of pupils' workbooks and folders, and observed the school at breaks, lunchtimes and after school.

Context

Since the previous inspection a new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed and the school has begun the process of becoming a sponsored academy.

Outcomes for pupils

- Most children enter Reception with levels of development that are typical or above those expected for their age. They make good progress during Reception, especially in writing, and are well prepared for school.
- Results of tests of Year 1 pupils' ability to recognise letters and sounds (phonics) are above national expectations.
- At the end of Key Stage 1, pupils are slightly below national expectations in reading and writing and broadly in line with national expectations in mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do better in mathematics than in writing. They perform least well in reading although there is evidence of improvement across all subjects.
- Pupils do not make the progress that they should during Key Stage 2, particularly in writing. At the previous inspection, writing was identified by inspectors as an area needing urgent attention. The 2015 Key Stage 2 results show that writing continues to be a weakness at the school. These results also show that the school was overgenerous in its predictions of how well pupils would do.
- The school is working with both Eldon Grove Academy, a local outstanding school, and Sunderland local authority to improve the accuracy of its assessment of pupils' work. Inspection evidence shows that this more rigorous approach to assessing pupils' work is having a positive impact. However, it is too early to tell whether this improvement is sustained. Her Majesty's Inspector will assess this during his next visit.

- The number of disadvantaged pupils in the primary school in each year is comparatively small. In Key Stage 1, where numbers are very small, all disadvantaged pupils achieved national standards in reading, writing and mathematics. This is an improvement on 2014's results. In Key Stage 2, all disadvantaged pupils achieved national expectations in reading but were below what is expected nationally in writing and mathematics.
- There was a significant gap between the predicted end of Key Stage 4 results and the grades pupils actually achieved at GCSE. This was, in part, because senior leaders did not act promptly enough to address shortcomings in past teaching. Nor did they address the poorer attendance of a relatively small number of disadvantaged pupils.
- There is too much variation in the results pupils achieve across the range of subjects at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils achieve well in some subjects but not in others. This is because the systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and the progress of individual pupils in each subject have not been rigorous enough. More rigorous systems are now in place and there is evidence that they are already having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. However, it is too early to assess whether this improvement is sustained. Her Majesty's Inspector will examine this during his next visit.
- A-level results in 2015 were broadly as expected and a slight improvement on 2014. However, leaders did not act promptly enough to address the comparatively poorer attendance of a small number of pupils. This had an adverse effect on outcomes for these pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

- The quality of teaching across the school continues to improve. Teachers are using the more detailed information about pupils that is now available to plan their work. Inspection evidence shows that there are still examples where teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can and should do. However, these are reducing because middle leaders are increasingly playing a more effective role in monitoring the quality of teaching.
- There have been significant improvements in the quality of the learning environment. There are now striking displays of pupils' work and helpful subject-specific information on classroom walls to stimulate thought and help pupils with their learning.
- The whole-school approach to marking continues to have a positive impact on learning. Almost all staff are now following the policy carefully. Pupils welcome this and the opportunities it offers them to reflect on and improve their work.
- The marking of spelling, especially in the upper school, continues to be too variable. Even where spelling errors are identified, it is not clear how this marking helps pupils learn to spell better next time.

- There are increasing opportunities for pupils across the school to explore mathematics in depth. Inspection evidence shows teachers encouraging pupils to tackle more 'open-ended' activities that help pupils deploy their growing range of mathematical skills. There is also evidence of more effective sharing of information about pupils' mastery of mathematics between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. This is helping to ensure that pupils, especially the most able, are making uninterrupted progress as they move from the primary to the secondary school.
- In the primary school, pupils are given opportunities to write at greater length and in a wider range of styles and genres in subjects other than English. However, inspection evidence shows that pupils could write even more and extend their experience and confidence as writers.
- Teaching in early years continues to improve. Children are confident and choose activities that extend their pleasure and skills in learning. Their progress is carefully recorded by staff and this information is used effectively to inform next steps.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

- The school's actions to keep pupils safe are effective. The senior leader with responsibility for this aspect of the school's work has ensured that systems are effective and rigorously monitored. Staff supervision of pupils at breaks and at the beginning and end of the day is careful and well organised.
- Pupils are well behaved. They move around the school carefully and show concern for the needs of others. They are polite and spoke confidently with inspectors about their work and their experience of school.
- Pupils see their teachers as a real strength of the school. A number, especially in the sixth form, spoke with real warmth about the efforts that their teachers make to support and encourage them in their work and development as young adults.
- Pupils report that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. Pupils are sure that if they did feel uncertain or unhappy, they could tell an adult and the matter would be resolved quickly and well.
- Senior leaders are ensuring that the use of 'internal' exclusion is reducing. However, some staff in the secondary school are still unclear about the purpose of this facility and are too quick to call on senior staff to remove pupils from their lessons. The quality of support that pupils receive in this area of the school is effective and carefully monitored.
- Pupils welcome the way that the recently introduced approach to marking and assessment involves them in their learning. Pupils say that they enjoy this 'interactive' approach because it helps them to understand what they need to do next to improve their work.

- At the start of this term the school introduced a programme of personal development, including sex and relationships education. Pupils report that they welcome this. However, it is too early to assess its impact. Her Majesty's Inspector will examine this during his next visit.
- Overall, attendance at the school is similar to national averages. However, the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils is poor and this is not being addressed systematically by senior leaders.
- Parents report that they are very pleased with the service the school offers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

- Senior leaders have a clear sense of what needs to be done to ensure that the school continues to improve. However, their plans are still undeveloped because they lack sufficient clarity about what success looks like and how progress towards this success is measured.
- The systems for monitoring the quality of staff performance are in place and senior leaders are beginning to take into account a broader range of evidence when assessing the impact of staff. However, there is still too much variability in the quality of teaching. This is because senior leaders are not acting promptly enough when shortcomings are identified by putting in place structured, focused and challenging support.
- Senior leaders and governors have not addressed the fact that there is no overall leadership of the primary section of the school. Phase leaders in primary are clear and realistic about the weaknesses in this part of the school. They have moved effectively to address them. However, they have not received sufficient time or focused support from senior leaders and, as a result, progress is not as swift and assured as it should be.
- School leaders do not give governors sufficiently detailed information about the school's performance. Leaders do not help governors understand what needs to be done. They are not clear enough about where weaknesses lie, and what needs to be done to address them. For example, leaders do not present attendance figures in ways that make clear the relative attendance of different groups of pupils, such as those who are disadvantaged, in the school. As a result, governors are not able to ask the challenging questions that will lead to sustained improvement.
- The way that leaders track pupils' outcomes across each key stage is increasingly effective. As a result, both leaders and teachers have a clearer sense of how pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve. This information about outcomes and targets for individual pupils is helping teachers to focus their teaching and improve learning.
- The leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is now more effective. A leader has been appointed and there is now more focused support and challenge from governors. The school is clear that, in the past, it has placed too much reliance on provision for these pupils that takes place outside the mainstream classrooms. A plan is now in place to support and challenge teachers in their work with this group

of pupils. However, it is too early to assess its impact. Her Majesty's Inspector will assess this aspect of the school's work during his next visit.

- Leaders have now put in place systems that make sure recruitment procedures are fair, open and transparent.
- Middle leaders' skills and insights are developing very well. This group of colleagues is increasingly taking a full and active role in planning, implementing and evaluating improvements to pupils' outcomes.
- Governors have a clearer sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because they are increasingly seeking information from sources other than senior leaders. Governors have, for example, engaged more directly with middle leaders and other staff.

External support

- The school has received effective support from Eldon Grove Academy, an outstanding local school. This support has focused on supporting leaders and challenging and validating teachers' judgements about how well pupils are doing.
- The school is also receiving effective support from Sunderland local authority. The authority is supporting the school in areas such as governance, human resources, behaviour and attendance. Officers of the local authority are also helping to assure the accuracy of teachers' judgements of pupils' work.