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Jane Götschel
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Dear Mrs Götschel

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lordswood Boys' School

Following my visit with Sue Morris-King, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Ofsted Inspectors Peter Kent and Gwen Onyon to your school on 17–18 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 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 academy is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham local authority.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in English and mathematics, and thereby raise students' attainment and accelerate their progress, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what all students, and particularly the most able, are capable of achieving
 - ensuring teachers provide all students with activities that are appropriately challenging
 - making sure that, in all subjects, consistent clear advice is given to students about how to improve their work
 - diligently checking the progress of all groups of students, and especially those from minority ethnic groups, across the range of subjects
 - encouraging students to be confident in classroom discussion and to think more deeply when responding to questions
 - ensuring that, in all lessons, poor behaviour does not impede learning
 - insisting that all teachers understand and effectively use systems for tracking the progress of students so that leaders at all levels have accurate information regarding students' progress
 - making sure that the teaching of writing and number skills is secure
 - making better use of pupil premium funds to close the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and others.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring all leaders and managers swiftly and effectively put agreed plans and policies into action
 - giving a high and urgent priority to implementing the school's programme for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
 - creating a clear, well understood and competently managed system for gathering and analyzing information about students' progress
 - making sure that senior and subject leaders are equally rigorous in monitoring teaching and learning and challenging teachers about the performance of different groups of students, particularly disadvantaged students
 - providing students with the opportunities when they leave to follow a range of appropriate pathways into education, training and employment
 - ensuring that all governors have a thorough and detailed understanding of information about how well students are achieving
 - ensuring that governors seek out parents' opinions about the school
 - senior leaders and governors closely monitoring to help make the best use of the school's allocation of pupil premium funding.

■ Improve behaviour and safety, by:

- ensuring that all students are clear about how they should behave in class
- ensuring all staff consistently apply the school's systems of rewards and sanctions for students' behaviour
- encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning and raising their academic expectations
- improving systems of communication, particularly for risk assessment, so that they are always rigorous and there is careful monitoring to ensure students are kept safe at all times.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 17–18 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, and the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed 21 lessons involving 19 teachers, including one lesson that was observed jointly with the headteacher. Short visits were made to a further 15 lessons to look at the use of tutor time, the academy's work to improve pupils' literacy, behaviour for learning and teachers' management of behaviour. An inspector also visited the academy's exclusion unit to evaluate the quality of support provided for pupils while excluded from lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons and at break and lunchtime and met formally with groups of pupils from Years 8 and 10. An inspector carried out short visits to 'applied learning' to look at the variety of enrichment activities available for pupils.

Context

Since the second monitoring inspection in April 2015 there have been significant changes in staffing. A new deputy headteacher started at the academy in September and there has been a further restructure of the roles of senior leaders. Almost half of the teaching staff were new at the start of this term, including most of the English department. As indicated at the last inspection, the school roll has fallen further with fewer than 50 pupils starting in Year 7 compared with over 120 pupils who left from Year 11.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils who completed Key Stage 4 in 2015 indicate that the academy is likely to remain below the current floor standard. Attainment in 2015 was broadly similar to that in 2014. Fewer than a third of pupils were successful in attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, which remains well below last year's national average. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in 2015 in English and mathematics showed little sign of improvement from 2014, with fewer than half of the Year 11 cohort making the progress they should. This is much slower progress than pupils make nationally. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 in 2015 had slightly better outcomes than in 2014. The wide gaps in attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils in the academy compared with others nationally narrowed slightly in English but were broadly similar in mathematics.

Information provided by academy leaders about current pupils indicates that, although there is still some underachievement in current Year 11, there are early signs of improvement in attainment and progress.

Attainment and progress for pupils in Years 7 to 10 cannot be compared with historical trends or national averages. This is because academy leaders have introduced a new approach to assessment and reporting. 'Flight paths' are used to help to identify individual pupils who are at risk of underachievement in any of their subjects. It is not yet clear how effective this is in helping leaders to check if attainment and progress is improving in the academy, as it has only very recently been introduced. At this time, no information was available to show if groups of pupils such as disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and those whose first language is not English, are doing any better than they have done in the past.

Pupils' achievements seen during lessons continue to vary. A new academy literacy policy has been agreed by teachers and literacy development is now given a priority in every lesson. Some teachers challenge spelling errors and encourage the correct use of grammar, including when pupils speak in class. However, this is not improving literacy skills as well as it might because academy leaders' expectations to address weaknesses in literacy are not consistently followed by all teachers. Some teachers confine themselves to checking subject-specific key words and subject terminology only. In science, sometimes there is too much emphasis given to remembering key words rather than learning about scientific processes. For example, pupils were seen to have repeated the same work on labelling the parts of a microscope three times, but were unable to explain the purpose of each part.

Good outcomes were seen in German where Year 9 pupils were encouraged to think about their body language when speaking to others, which helped them to improve their communication. In mathematics, pupils in Year 10 were able to choose the correct trigonometrical ratio to find the length of a missing side, or the size of an angle, with confidence. In English, pupils demonstrate enthusiasm for their work and this is a thread across the whole department and for all ability groups which leads to pupils willingly tackling harder work.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching continues to improve but inconsistencies in the quality of teaching exist within most subjects and across the academy where teachers have not taken on board academy leaders' new expectations for teaching, learning and assessment. Almost half of the teachers have only recently started in the academy and a period of embedding is required as all teachers become more familiar with these expectations.

Teachers' assessments were broadly accurate in 2015 because two specialist leaders of education (SLEs) working with the academy at that time carried out external validation of assessments in all subjects. No checks on the accuracy of assessment information have been carried out this term so leaders cannot be wholly confident

that the information provided to them continues to be accurate. Academy leaders are at an advanced stage in developing their preferred approach to reporting on attainment and progress without the use of national curriculum levels using the new GCSE scale from 1 to 9. Teachers have devised their own criteria to use when assessing work against this new scale, but not all teachers are confident in making these judgements.

In the majority of lessons, pupils demonstrated enthusiasm for their learning, enjoyed the challenges set and showed respect for one another and their teachers. Strategies that promoted good learning were typically related to individual teachers rather than demonstrating consistently strong practice in any particular subject. For example, effective marking was seen from one religious education teacher where pupils were encouraged to extend their answers through the helpful comments. Pupils were asked to take responsibility for their learning in physical education and they ably demonstrated their skills in cooperating with others and supporting their peers; skills which then continued into lunchtime. In drama, pupils were encouraged to develop resilience as they improved their performances. Good use was made of assessment in English where teachers encouraged pupils to look carefully at their mistakes and improve their work.

Although there is a whole-academy focus on literacy development, many teachers are not aware of basic strategies to support literacy improvement such as making their writing big enough for all pupils to read in the class, and ensuring that the level of information on the board is right for the pupils in the class. Literacy displays were seen in most classrooms showing, for example, word of the week, key words and examples of connectives, but these were very rarely used as a teaching resource.

Broken blinds, uneven floors and poor lighting in some areas of the building do not encourage a positive climate for learning. In other areas, learning is actually hindered such as in science where there are difficulties accessing water and gas supplies.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning have improved since the previous monitoring inspection. Throughout the inspection, pupils were well mannered, pleasant and helpful to visitors. Many were keen to talk about their academy and the changes that have happened. In lessons, the vast majority of pupils focused well on their learning and in the best examples, pupils' attitudes were impressive. For example, older pupils showed mature attitudes to discussing challenging topics in a religious education lesson and younger pupils worked very hard together in groups to produce a piece of drama. Low-level disruption was still seen on occasions and teachers did not always use the school's systems to challenge this quickly or effectively enough. Pupils behaved well at break and lunchtimes, organising their own football games, eating together and showing respect for staff and resources. A

new Year 11 study and social area is popular and pupils care for it as well. The academy has introduced a prefect system following a rigorous recruitment process. The prefects are clear about their responsibilities and already have a presence around the school at social times.

The use of fixed-term exclusion has fallen considerably and hardly any pupils have been excluded more than once since the previous monitoring inspection. Internal exclusion is used as an alternative to fixed-term exclusion where appropriate, and its use is also falling. Again, very few pupils re-offend once this sanction has been applied.

Overall attendance has risen considerably since the summer term and this term attendance is close to the national average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has fallen and the academy challenges and supports those pupils whose rates of absence continue to be too high. The academy has made a concerted effort to improve pupils' punctuality to school and to lessons, introducing good clear routines, and impressing upon pupils the purpose of the changes they have made. When pupils are late to school in the morning they have to attend a detention on the same day with their form tutor. This is having a noticeable impact on the time they arrive at school. Of the first day of the inspection, pupils who were in danger of being late ran up the path to get into school. At break and lunchtime, staff asked pupils to move indoors shortly before the bell, thereby ensuring lesson time is maximised. Pupils say this happens every day. In corridors, pupils moved swiftly and sensibly to their next lessons with little prompting from staff.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership at the highest level is dysfunctional. A tension exists between the executive headteacher and the headteacher which leads to poor communication and risks undermining the positive improvements that have been made since the previous monitoring inspection. There are considerable issues still to resolve.

Great advances have been made in introducing new systems in the academy which support leaders in checking if their actions to improve the academy are making any difference. Targets set for pupils in each subject are now realistic, but represent a more appropriate degree of challenge. New systems have very recently been introduced to monitor the progress made by pupils compared with these targets and to identify when their progress slows. Checks on behaviour and attendance have improved. Leaders now gather and analyse information about behaviour and attendance systematically and are using it well to target their actions. Their work to improve punctuality has been effective and the new expectations they have set about pupils getting to school, and lessons, on time have helped to create a sense of purpose among the pupils.

Leaders have rationalised their approach to interventions for pupils who need additional support. There is a greater clarity about the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs.

Leaders carry out more frequent checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and make an overall judgement on what they have seen. These judgements are sometimes overly positive because they do not make sufficient use of the information leaders have about pupils' outcomes. Comments fed back to teachers do not relate to their performance targets so leaders are unclear about the strengths of teaching that are making the greatest difference to learning. Links between training provided and the needs of teachers are not made explicit, or developed in any coherent way.

Governors receive a wide range of information from academy leaders which keeps them informed about the success of actions to improve the academy, including a helpfully colour-coded action plan. Records of governors' meetings could be further improved by recording the key questions asked in response to presentations from leaders, and agreed actions with deadlines for follow-up or further review.

The academy's budget has continued to be heavily subsidised by the sponsor through Lordswood Girls' School financial reserves, but this can no longer continue. There is now a serious shortfall in the financial situation of the academy and uncertainty around plans to reduce this deficit budget. This is having an impact on the variety of subjects academy leaders are able to offer as they cannot afford to recruit more teachers or to upgrade facilities that would enable a greater range of subjects to be taught. For example, product design is the only available design and technology course for pupils in Year 10, and Key Stage 3 food technology is restricted to microwave cooking due to the lack of working ovens. During the inspection, a decision was made to remove music from the curriculum, due to the absence of the music teacher. Year 10 pupils who chose this subject have already started their music course, but have now been asked to change to history or business studies. Intensive support is now required to help these pupils to catch up with work they have missed.

External support

The academy does not have enough external support. Support provided previously by the sponsor was of good quality and was starting to make a difference; for example, the support from SLEs to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. However due to factors such as a shortage of capacity in the sponsor school, this valuable work has had to stop. The future of this support remains uncertain as the process of looking for an alternative sponsor for the academy has already started. Academy leaders plan to develop links with other schools but this has not yet started. Teachers from most subjects do not have enough opportunity to share their practice with others or to have conversations about how to improve their skills.