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Mr Dean Coombes  
Headteacher  
St Matthias School  
Deans Road  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 2BH

Dear Mr Coombes

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of St Matthias School**

Following my visit with Dr Peter Kent, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 24–25 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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:

### **Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. However, this should be in consultation with me.

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 Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Gwen Coates**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, so that it is at least good for all students by making sure that all teachers:
  - make accurate assessments of the levels students are working at, especially at Key Stage 3
  - match work to the different ability levels in their class so that it is neither too easy nor too difficult for students, especially those on school action
  - regularly tell students how they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work
  - help students to improve their literacy and communication skills through telling them about errors in spelling or grammar and supporting them to improve their handwriting.
- Make sure all students make at least good progress, so that the standards they reach, particularly in English and mathematics, are sustained at a level which is at least equal to national averages by ensuring that:
  - the work that is planned for students in Key Stage 3 recognises what students can already do and builds on this
  - students are given opportunities to develop their skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics and to use these in other subjects
  - students who receive support from teaching assistants or other adults are not reliant on this support but develop their ability to think really hard about their work.
- Improve leadership so that all students achieve well by:
  - making sure that all students receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum and religious education, and that school leaders recruit subject specialist teachers to teach humanities subjects
  - providing support for all students who have weak literacy skills so that they are identified early, and an effective support programme is quickly put into place
  - carrying out frequent checks on the quality of the school's work by observing teaching more frequently and using information on the progress made by students to inform judgements on the quality of teaching over time
  - developing a more effective system for checking on the progress being made by students, so that clear information can be provided to school leaders to enable them to identify and take action where progress is slow
  - making sure there is a school improvement plan which has been shared with all staff and which is regularly updated
  - ensuring that pupil premium and Year 7 catch up funding are having a sustained effect on improving progress for the students who are entitled to these resources.

- Continue to build on the improvements that have already been seen in attendance to ensure it remains above the national average by:
  - monitoring closely the attendance of all students including groups such as disabled students and those who have special educational needs or who are supported by pupil premium funding
  - working more closely with parents, carers and external agencies.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 24–25 November 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher; senior and middle leaders; groups of pupils; the Chair of the Governing Body; and the local authority's school improvement adviser. Parts of 21 lessons were observed, some jointly with middle and senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited a number of form periods and observed pupils around the school at the start of the day and during break and lunchtimes.

### **Context**

The school moved to a new building on the same site in September 2015 and its name changed to St Matthias School. A new head of physical education, who also has responsibility for supporting disadvantaged pupils, was appointed in September 2015. Additional teachers in mathematics and in modern languages have been appointed and two more teachers of mathematics will take up posts in January 2016.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

In summer 2015, the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, fell slightly. Mathematics saw a more significant decline in attainment and progress. Despite a decline in the proportion of pupils gaining pass grades in English, performance in English remains strong as indicated by the high proportion of pupils who made the progress expected of them or made more than expected progress. The achievement of different groups of pupils reflects this relative performance in English and mathematics. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is still too wide because of the gap in mathematics; in English the gap has closed completely. The gap between the achievement of boys and girls is too wide.

School information about the progress of current pupils in Years 7 to 11 suggests much stronger performance – although the performance of current Year 11 pupils is not as positive as that of younger pupils in the school. The stronger focus on literacy in the school can be seen in pupils' workbooks, which indicate consistent identification of, and improvement in, spelling and in the overall presentation of work. Pupils' attitudes to learning observed during the inspection were positive and reflect the school's own evaluation that, for example, current Year 11 pupils overall have a more positive attitude and work ethos than the previous Year 11 pupils.

## **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching overall continues to improve and positive relationships between teachers and pupils contribute to this. Pupils say that teaching is now more structured, has more pace and meets their needs better. They say they feel more confident that they are being correctly prepared to achieve high grades. Teaching assistants are used appropriately to support the learning of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Teaching assistants' skilled contribution is evident in the way that they not only support pupils but also encourage them to become self-reliant learners.

While there are examples of very good practice in relation to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school, there are still too many inconsistencies and this is reflected in the varying rates of progress and attainment of pupils across subjects. Where the impact of teaching on learning is strong, teachers' planning matches work to different ability groups and, as a result, all pupils achieve well. However, in some lessons such planning is not reflected in the actual learning activities, which fail to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. Inspectors noted that regular marking of pupils' work takes place and that this includes detailed feedback about how pupils can improve their work. However, pupils' responses to such feedback are not always of a quality to indicate that work has improved. Whole-school professional development has, and is, promoting a stronger focus on literacy across subjects. However, opportunities for literacy development are not consistently used by all teachers.

Where teaching and learning are strong, teachers build momentum and pace into their lessons so that pupils remain engaged and on task. However, in some lessons, groups of pupils lose focus either because they finish tasks early or because they are waiting for help from the teacher. Good use of questioning by many teachers supports learning well. However, questioning is not always sufficiently open or probing to ensure that pupils are being stretched, encouraged to listen actively and to think deeply. The level of challenge for the most able is not consistently high enough.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Attendance, including the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, has improved. The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions has fallen, and there has been a significant reduction in the number of detentions given. Punctuality has significantly improved because pupils are keen to come to school to learn and because they understand the importance of 'lost learning time', which they must make up at the end of the day if they are late.

Despite these substantial improvements, there are still pupils, mostly boys, who fail to engage fully in learning activities. During the inspection, occasionally such behaviour occurred when other pupils were sharing important or sensitive information with the class. Teachers did not always challenge such behaviour, suggesting that not all teachers have the highest expectations of behaviour or that not all are able to address all forms of off-task behaviour, including passive inactivity, effectively.

The move to the new school has been a real success – pupils and staff comment very positively on this. Pupils now say they feel proud to be a part of their new school. Years 8 and 9 pupils say that behaviour is 'a lot better' than it was when they joined the school, and that the move to the new school has made it even better. Pupils say they feel safe and confident at school.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The use of information about academic and behavioural outcomes has improved and much more emphasis is now given to the analysis and evaluation of such information about individual groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and boys.

The strong improvements in relation to behaviour, safety and well-being noted above are as a result of detailed analyses, more rigorous monitoring and well-targeted actions that enable early and effective interventions. This reflects well on the quality of leadership of this area. Despite this, more time is needed to embed the changes that have been made so that they become part of the school's long-term culture.

Detailed analyses of the reasons for the decline in achievement of 2015 Year 11 pupils have led to prompt and effective action, particularly at subject leader level. This includes detailed work on ensuring the reliability of predictions about attainment; rigorous half-termly monitoring and evaluation of information about pupils' progress and decisions on appropriate interventions; and sharpening subject leaders' accountability for pupils' performance by introducing more formalised and more consistent quality assurance procedures. However, the quality of leadership at subject level remains variable.

The curriculum has improved. All pupils now study religious education and subject specialists teach humanities subjects. Safeguarding arrangements are securely in place, including a programme to address the 'Prevent' agenda and to promote British values.

There are real strengths in teacher development, for example in the introduction of activities such as 'lesson study', which are intended to bring about long-term improvement in the impact of teaching and learning on pupils' progress. However, the leadership and management of teaching and learning are not yet rigorous enough, and are not linked coherently and robustly enough with the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress, to bring about rapid improvement across all subjects. At whole-school level, many effective actions are being taken that are having a positive impact on the quality of education provided. However, senior leaders have not yet established a sharp, very clear and coherent plan to challenge all aspects of performance and move the school forward at a faster pace. To this end a review of the senior leadership team's roles and responsibilities is about to be undertaken.

The governing body continues to provide strong support and challenge to school leaders. It has ensured that a more robust performance management process is now in place, with teachers' and leaders' progression being linked closely to pupils' outcomes. Governors are well aware of the school's strengths and the areas that need further improvement. For example, they note weaknesses in impact at senior leader level and the need to review the existing structure, and they identify the need for more sharply focused local authority and school-to-school support, in order to assist in improving the quality of senior and middle leadership of the school.

### **External support**

Since the last section 5 inspection when the school was placed in special measures, local authority involvement, although supportive, has not been sufficiently sharply focused to enable the school to improve at a very rapid pace. For example, the local authority school improvement board which sat in October 2015, and, according to the local authority statement of action (revised January 2015), is supposed to meet at least every half term, has not been convened regularly and thus has had little impact on the school's performance. To date, the school has had a range of support from consultants, including the local authority appointed consultant, and from a variety of other schools. Although positive in its impact on individual subject areas, this support, overall, has been piecemeal and its impact patchy. The school has not, for example, benefited from a formal link with a high-performing school partner that might provide regular support and a sharp focus on leadership at both senior and subject level.