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Mr Michael Taylor
Principal
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Dingle Vale
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Dear Mr Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of King's Leadership Academy Liverpool

Following my visit (with Judith Straw, Ofsted Inspector, and Osama Abdul Rahim, Ofsted Inspector) to your academy on 2 and 3 December 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). However, NQTs employed and supported by the sponsor may be deployed at the academy.

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 Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Director for Children and Young People's Services for Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or outstanding so that students make at least good progress that is sustained over time and standards rise throughout the academy, especially in English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of information on students' previous learning and build on this more effectively to increase the progress they make in lessons and over time
 - raising expectations of what students are capable of achieving, particularly boys, those who are most able and those whose first language is not English
 - using homework, marking and verbal feedback consistently and effectively to stretch students to achieve more and improve the presentation of their work
 - developing further students' speaking and listening skills across the curriculum, for example, through effective questioning to promote more extended responses that demonstrate their understanding
 - reducing levels of staff absence.

- Improve the impact of leadership and its ability to secure improvements across the academy, including in the sixth form, by:
 - increasing the rigour and accuracy of the academy's self-evaluation and quality assurance procedures, including the use of information on the performance of all cohorts of students
 - holding all those in leadership positions fully to account for the impact of their work on students' achievement and on the performance of other staff at all levels
 - ensuring that staff fully understand and subscribe to the leadership's vision for the academy's improvement, including its proposals for a staffing restructure to maintain its financial viability
 - developing further the skills of the governing body to understand and use data effectively to ask more searching questions about the achievement of different groups of students
 - reviewing the quality and range of subjects that the academy provides in order to better meet the interests and needs of all students.

- Improve students' behaviour so that it makes a more positive contribution to their progress, by:
 - eliminating any off-task misbehaviour in lessons and tutorial times by encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own good attitudes to learning, whether or not they are with their regular teachers
 - increasing students' levels of interest and involvement in lessons, and promoting a love of learning
 - further raising students' attendance, particularly in the sixth form.

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

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

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised documents. They held meetings with the Principal and other senior leaders, groups of six middle leaders and six other members of staff, including four teachers and two assistant progress leaders. Inspectors met formally with 16 pupils in two groups and had informal conversations with others during the academy's day. Meetings were held with the Chair of the IEB who is also the Chief Executive Officer of Great Schools Trust (GST) – the academy's new sponsor. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons, including two joint observations with senior leaders. They also observed morning tutor times and an assembly and pupils' behaviour throughout the academy day. An inspector visited a presentation about equality and diversity to Year 9 pupils which was led by a representative of the Anthony Walker Foundation on the second day of the inspection. Inspectors examined pupils' books in lessons and a further sample was examined jointly with a senior leader.

Context

Since the previous inspection, GST has become the academy's sponsor. It was anticipated that this change would take place on 1 September 2015 but it was delayed until 1 November 2015. A new Principal and five other senior leaders have joined the school together with nine other teachers. One member of the previous senior leadership team has continued in her post. Five teachers with permanent contracts have left the school and very few supply teachers are now required.

For the first half of the autumn term, the new senior leadership team had operational responsibility for the school but this was in liaison with the previous interim Principal who acted as executive principal for this period, on behalf of the previous sponsor.

An IEB has been set up. This will provide local governance for the academy.

A new pupils' uniform has been introduced. The academy's buildings have been fully redecorated and new display boards, which set out GSTs expectations and aspirations for pupils, installed in corridors and other areas of the academy. A room has been equipped as a hair-dressing salon to allow Key Stage 4 pupils to develop their vocational skills on site.

The sixth form is not in operation – with no classes offered and no pupils joining in September 2015.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils are learning effectively and their progress has speeded up since the start of this term.

The achievement of pupils in Year 11 in 2015 was lower than previously predicted by the academy and did not meet national expectations. There were small increases in pupils' attainment when compared to the results in 2014 but progress was too slow and gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others opened up. Current senior leaders have used the available information to consider why pupils' outcomes in 2015 remained too low and have taken immediate action in response.

Leaders have introduced a new system to give a rigorous structure to learning and assessment. This has started to provide detailed information on how well pupils are doing. Leaders arranged for pupils currently in Year 11 to sit formal examinations in English, mathematics and science at the start of this year. These examinations showed that pupils had large gaps in their knowledge and understanding but also provided clear starting points for teachers' work with them. Pupils completed further examinations after five weeks and the results showed that pupils had made rapid progress; their results rose, on average, by about one and a half GCSE grades in English and science and by half a grade in mathematics. Leaders are fully aware of the continuing need to accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics so that pupils do similarly well in all subjects. Examinations were completed by other year groups for the first time just before half term. Leaders have used the results from these to set a baseline for all pupils' achievement. As pupils' second set of examinations will not be completed until later this term, it is too early to judge pupils' progress from information about their examination success.

Pupils in Years 8 to 11 who spoke to inspectors said that they are learning more this year than previously. Inspectors saw evidence of this faster progress in pupils' books where their recent work was more detailed and demonstrated more understanding than at the start of the year. This was particularly apparent in Year 11 pupils' books and demonstrated encouraging gains by pupils with both higher and lower starting points. Observation of learning in lessons also showed that pupils are, in general, making faster progress. However, in some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3, where learning does not engage pupils well and their behaviour is consequently less good, pupils continue to make progress which is too slow.

Leaders have ensured that pupils in all years have had their reading ability assessed. For some pupils this was the first time that this had been done. Information from these assessments is used to determine which pupils should receive additional teaching or other help to develop their skills. Once again, leaders intend to use the information already collected to allow them to check on pupils' progress over time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving. It is starting to help pupils to catch up more rapidly on gaps in their learning. Leaders have identified that there is still too much teaching which requires improvement or is ineffective; inspection evidence confirms this.

The new senior leaders recognise that only the highest quality teaching will allow pupils to do as well as they should. Steps were taken to improve teaching even before GST had responsibility for the academy. GST made careful searches to identify and permanently appoint effective teachers to replace the high proportion of temporary teachers previously at the academy. A very small number of posts are currently covered by long-term supply staff. In addition, staff absence has dropped and so there is less need for short-term supply teachers. On previous monitoring inspections, pupils said that they learned less well when they were taught by temporary teachers; on this inspection they said that teaching had improved and that one reason for this was because they now had permanent teachers.

Leaders ensure that teaching improves through their close observation of teachers' effectiveness. This involves lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' written work, and will increasingly include information available from the regular testing of pupils as this becomes available. If teachers are not reaching the high standards of effectiveness set by leaders, planned support and coaching are put in place. The number of teachers included in such programmes has fallen since the start of the year. Leaders confirm that this support is being effective and evidence for this was seen by inspectors in teachers' classroom practice. In addition, training is offered to all teachers through compulsory sessions, well-attended extra voluntary sessions and smaller scale opportunities for teachers to share ideas and examples of teaching approaches that work well.

Teaching in all subjects is divided up into five-week blocks which then lead into a week of formal tests. Once the tests are marked, a further week is provided for teachers to work with pupils to make sure that any weaker areas of learning are tackled. As well as structuring learning, this allows staff to check how well pupils are doing and teachers to adjust their teaching to make sure that pupils are at less risk of falling behind. These checks involve class teachers, subject leaders, senior leaders and the IEB. Information from them is also considered by GST and used in partnership with the other schools in GST to check that teachers' assessments are accurate.

Marking has improved. Teachers are using more consistent approaches to letting pupils know what they have done well in written work but also in suggesting additional tasks to extend their learning. While inspectors saw increasingly helpful comments from teachers and better response from pupils in some books, there is still too much variation in the quality of such feedback.

The special educational needs coordinator has completed a full review of pupils to make sure that those with special educational needs have been identified and can be given additional teaching. Clear information about pupils' individual needs is shared with staff. The academy is in the process of appointing teaching assistants to provide additional support and specialist teaching for such pupils. Teaching groups have been reorganised to allow teachers to better focus on pupils' additional needs, for example those with very low literacy skills or those who are at an early stage of learning to speak English.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are well-cared-for and their behaviour in lessons is improving. Improvement in pupils' behaviour when they move around the school is slower.

Robust policies and systems are in place to ensure that pupils are safe and properly safeguarded. The local authority's review of the academy's systems to check that only suitable staff are employed was completed during the previous academy year. It confirmed that the academy's systems for appointing staff were secure; similar systems continue to be used. Leaders liaise closely with external partners whenever this is necessary to protect or support pupils. The academy has very recently appointed a community worker in order to improve contact with and offer better support to Gypsy/Roma pupils and their families.

The improved teaching has led to improved behaviour in many lessons. However, when teaching does not interest or engage pupils, their behaviour can become unacceptable. The behaviour of pupils in Years 7 and 8 is less good than that of older pupils. School leaders acknowledge that they have had to focus on the learning needs of Key Stage 4 pupils in order to quickly close previous gaps. However, it is essential that deficits in learning or behaviour for younger pupils are not allowed to build up.

Pupils continue to be friendly and positive towards visitors and generally get on well together. However, there is still too much boisterous behaviour when pupils are moving around the school. There are clear expectations that staff will be at classroom doors to monitor pupils' movement and to greet them but some areas are less well supervised. Inspectors saw pupils pushing each other, running and being rowdy. Leaders identified that the behaviour of Year 8 pupils outside lessons was affecting their learning in lessons. They have set up a strict system of these pupils lining up before they go to lessons at the start of school and after breaks. Leaders report that this has improved learning.

Leaders have introduced a new rewards and sanctions system. Pupils say that this is fair and understand how good attitudes, behaviour and attendance will be rewarded and the consequences when these are not acceptable. The school records show that there have been more instances of serious poor behaviour. However, this reflects a

'no tolerance' approach towards pupils breaching basic standards such as following instructions and not being defiant.

Attendance fell in the previous school year and the wide gap below national average got bigger. Leaders have put in place a range of measures to improve attendance and punctuality. For example, an inspector saw good attendance of a Year 7 form group and of individuals being celebrated and rewarded in an assembly. Overall absence and long-term absence are starting to reduce.

The academy has introduced 'aspire' lessons for all pupils. These develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of GST's values and ethos. During the inspection, pupils' broader education was illustrated by the presentations about equality and diversity provided for older students by the Anthony Walker Foundation. An inspector saw one of these sessions being enhanced by a teacher being willing to share his experience and linking this to the diversity of the academy.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal and other senior leaders demonstrate absolute determination to ensure that improvement continues and speeds up. The actions they have already taken have led to improved teaching and enabled pupils to make faster progress this term.

The senior leadership team is well structured, with senior leaders having clear responsibilities which match the needs of the academy. The inclusion of a previous senior leader has provided continuity and information about the academy's systems and approaches in the past. Staff recognise the changes that senior leaders are bringing about and those who spoke to inspectors said that they have confidence in the new team. This is contributing to the continuing good morale of staff. It is also reflected in teachers' willingness to engage in training to improve their practice.

Leaders clearly understand the issues faced by the academy. They have completed an initial evaluation of the academy and have used this to prepare a new action plan to guide improvement. The plan was put in place very quickly and leaders are already checking what has been achieved to help them understand what they still need to do. Most actions in the plan are indicated as finishing at the end of this term; this gives an appropriate sense of urgency but does not indicate how improvement will be sustained in the longer term. In addition, some of the criteria which leaders will use to determine if their actions have been successful lack precision; this means that opportunities to raise expectations further are sometimes missed. Members of the IEB are aware of the plan and what has already been achieved. However, details of how they will ensure it stays on track are not included in the plan itself. The plan to decide how the additional funding available to support disadvantaged pupils is used is less developed, although it does reflect important priorities for these pupils.

Middle leadership has improved as a result of new appointments of subject leaders and training which is planned to develop leaders' skills. Senior leaders plan for this to be extended further to cover the full range of leadership challenges which middle leaders may face. Leaders have undertaken a first review of how different subjects are offered by the academy. Many of the pupils previously taking part in off-site alternative provision have been reintroduced to the academy's normal work. Leaders have made this arrangement so that they can more closely monitor the learning and welfare of these pupils. As some of these pupils have had poor attendance in the past, the academy's improving attendance indicates even greater success. Those pupils continuing to work off-site are closely monitored. Leaders have started to consider how they can better offer vocational learning on site. This work has started with the installation of the well-equipped hair salon. Leaders have ambitious plans to extend this kind of provision in the future.

The IEB has been established very recently. It has only had time to meet once but has already been provided with detailed information so that its members can offer informed challenge to leaders. GST has ensured that the members of the IEB have a broad range of skills and experience and represent the wider local community.

External support

GST worked closely with the Department for Education (DfE) and University of Chester Academies' Trust to ensure the transition to the new sponsor went smoothly. GST is still working to finalise all aspects of the transfer of financial arrangements to ensure that current pupils can benefit fully from all available funding. Additional funding provided by the DfE has been used, in part, to make the academy more attractive, to clearly set out GST's aspirations and to help pupils to take the first steps in rebuilding their pride in the academy and their learning.

The Chief Executive Officer of GST is providing strong support and firm challenge to the Principal and was instrumental in the change of sponsor. More widely, GST is providing direct support to teaching, learning and assessment; examples include the appointment of teachers from the other GST schools and the joint checks on teachers' work across its academies. In addition, GST is providing effective support for newly qualified teachers.

The academy is continuing to work with the local authority, in particular, to seek out specialist help for vulnerable students or those at risk.