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Mr L Tristham
Charlton School
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Dear Mr Tristham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Charlton School

Following my visit to your school on 25 and 26 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection without first discussing this with me.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Telford and Wrekin. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all students, especially disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs and the most-able students make good or better progress, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have high expectations of what students should achieve in lessons, in particular of the quantity and quality of work that students produce
 - plan lessons that challenge and interest students and cause them to think deeply and work hard, so that they are engaged in their learning and low-level disruption is eliminated
 - plan lessons that enable disabled students or those who have special educational needs to make progress, by making sure that they take into account what these students already understand and can do
 - provide students with marking and feedback that is regular and which helps them to improve their work.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, so that there is rapid improvement in the achievement of students, especially disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs and the most able students, by ensuring that:
 - all leaders and governors have a correct view of the school's strengths and weaknesses based upon detailed and accurate evaluations of teaching, achievement and behaviour
 - improvement plans urgently address students' underachievement
 - aspirational attainment targets are set that raise expectations of what all students should achieve
 - teachers are able to make accurate assessments of students' attainment
 - leaders and teachers are set targets for their work that are clearly focused on the school's urgent need to raise standards
 - training for individual teachers is based on accurate evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses and is targeted to have maximum impact on improving achievement
 - all subject leaders have the skills and capacity to improve teaching and raise standards in their subjects
 - the pupil premium grant is spent effectively to rapidly improve the progress of disadvantaged students
 - the progress that disabled students or those who have special educational needs are making, both in lessons and through extra support, is carefully tracked

- governors have the knowledge and skills that mean they are not reliant on school leaders for their understanding of the school's performance, and are therefore able to hold leaders properly to account.

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 first monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, students, a member of the interim executive board (IEB), a local leader of education and a representative of the local authority. A telephone conversation was also held with the chair of the IEB. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection the previous headteacher has left and an IEB has been put in place. The senior leadership team has been re-structured and now comprises the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, two assistant headteachers and an associate headteacher. The school is currently in negotiations to secure a sponsor prior to conversion to academy status.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for students dipped further in 2015. A major reason for this was the poor rates of progress in English. These were not outweighed by better achievement in some subjects, including the gains made in mathematics, both in terms of improved rates of progress and students' gaining an A to C grade in this subject. Early information shows that gaps in attainment for disadvantaged students and others in the school remain unacceptably wide as do those for disabled students and students who have special educational needs.

The school has developed a system for monitoring students' progress in each subject. This is having a positive impact on the ability of curriculum leaders and teachers to better identify where any student is underperforming and to take action through targeted additional support to address this. However, although work is currently taking place to establish an overarching whole school monitoring system, this is not yet in place. Consequently, leaders do not yet have a quick and easily accessible tool to enable a strategic overview of rates of progress overall and for groups of students, other than for Year 11. We agreed that establishing this is a matter of urgency so that at my next visit leaders are able to provide a clear analysis of the rates of progress made by all students and groups of students from Year 7 onwards.

The school's first assessment point under the new system has provided key information about where students are in relation to the flight paths that have been developed to track their progress through to Year 11. However, it is not possible to measure impact in terms of improved rates of progress until the second assessment point at the end of the term. This is because assessment has not been accurate in the recent past. While leaders now have more confidence in teachers' assessments as a result of training provided, the use of external marking and regular checks, they do not yet have evidence of increased accuracy over time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers have good subject knowledge and, in the vast majority of cases, they plan lessons and sequences of learning that engage the interest of students. There is a clear requirement by leaders to plan for different groups and abilities with a focus on teachers knowing their classes well. As a result, support within lessons for disabled students and those who have special educational needs has improved. Inspectors noted this particularly in mathematics, where effective deployment of teaching assistants targeted to support identified students resulted in good progress. However, in too many lessons observed, teachers were not challenging the most able and all students completed the same task regardless of their starting points.

Students' books show that the whole school marking policy, implemented last term, is now being applied consistently by the vast majority of teachers. This is having a positive impact, particularly for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. As a result, they have a better understanding of how to improve. Students say that they appreciate the new way of marking and state that they now have a much better understanding of what they can do well and how they can improve further. Furthermore, they say that teachers nearly always make sure that they then complete the 'closing the gap' tasks set. Consequently they feel as if they are making better progress. Evidence in students' books supports this view in some subjects. However, it remains the case that too many teachers do not have high enough expectations of presentation and of the amount of writing students should produce. In some cases, teachers failed to correct spelling and grammatical errors so that students continued to make the same mistakes over several pieces of work.

Leaders have now implemented a regular cycle for monitoring the quality of teaching, which includes checking students' books, evaluating lesson planning and visiting lessons. This has led to teachers having a clearer understanding of what is expected of them and to leaders being able to intervene more rapidly when improvement is required. Training is better matched to teachers' needs and staff say it is helping them to improve alongside the whole school training that is offered.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strong aspect of school provision. Assemblies regularly celebrate endeavour and success and these are valued by students. Inspectors noted that opportunities for developing awareness and understanding of a range of issues were provided across the curriculum. For instance, in tutor time students were learning about the moral issues around drug addiction, in geography they were encouraged to consider the values of other cultures in the face of natural disasters and in religious education students developed empathy with other belief systems. As a result, consideration for others is a feature across the school.

Learning is valued by most students and they appreciate the efforts made by staff to support them when they need extra help. For instance they spoke about 'lesson 7', an after-school session in any subject on any day for those students who require further support. All students spoken to expressed their appreciation for their teachers and how they take care of them. This is reflected in the good relationships between students and staff noted by inspectors.

Attendance remains in line with national averages. Although the rate of fixed-term exclusions has risen slightly, it is below the rate found nationally. This is because of the effective support provided by the school through its Compass Point provision, which aims to provide support and guidance for those students struggling with behavioural or emotional issues.

Conduct is variable at different times of the day and in different areas of the school, both in and out of lessons. Arrival and departure times are calm and orderly, but at lunchtime some students can be boisterous and occasional pushing and shoving was noted, particularly in the crowded dining area. During the split lunch period, low-level disruption in remaining lessons increased slightly, particularly where these lessons were close to social areas for those students on their lunch break.

Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They say that the school makes sure they understand all risks and what to do if they feel uncomfortable about any behaviours they might experience. Although they say that bullying occurs, they are confident that it is dealt with quickly and effectively.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

A number of barriers to progress had to be tackled during the summer term immediately following the section 5 inspection. These included establishing the IEB

and the new interim leadership team, both of which became fully functional in September. Further, the local authority's programme of support and challenge for school leaders has only come fully into effect this term. As a result, although the required processes and systems to secure improvement have now been put in place, much of the action taken has been very recent. Consequently, these are not as embedded as they should be at this point and have not had time to have a measurable impact on improving the progress of students. Where earlier action was taken, greater impact has been achieved. For instance the current headteacher quickly introduced 'Rapid 10', which focused on improving the way in which lessons were planned and delivered and introduced 'closing the gap' marking. Inspectors noted that progress made in these areas was considerably greater than in other, newer, initiatives.

Since September, a coherent programme of support has been put in place through the local authority. A very experienced local leader of education has been commissioned to support the school and has already made a very positive contribution to building the capacity of the leadership team. As a result, leaders have now developed an understanding of what needs to be done and where the priorities lie. For instance there is now a much clearer understanding of how well students are doing and where the gaps are that need to be addressed. This is because leaders are now regularly gathering a wide range of information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the standard of achievement in the school. We agreed that the next step is to ensure that the information gathered is effectively analysed so that it enables leaders to make informed, strategic decisions quickly and so that they have key information about students' progress at their fingertips.

Despite the increasing capacity of leaders in the school, there is still some lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities across some areas of the leadership team. For instance, the leadership of teaching has improved. There are clear systems in place to ensure that the full range of evidence is analysed in order to inform judgements made about the quality of teaching overall and of the impact of individual teachers on students' progress. This information is used much more precisely now so that support and training can be more tailored to meet the needs of individuals. However, the identification of that support and its delivery is the responsibility of a different team member. As a result, there is not necessarily a coherent picture of the impact of training and development on meeting the school's priorities as well as the needs of individual teachers.

Middle leadership has begun to improve. This is because new monitoring systems have been introduced which require subject leaders to make effective use of the assessment information now provided for them to inform actions to address students' progress. This has clarified and emphasised their primary role to improve

students' progress, particularly as there is now a plan in place for meetings with senior leaders each half term which will focus on ensuring that actions and their impact are evaluated.

We discussed the ways in which leaders are developing their ability to quickly and accurately evaluate impact across the range of actions identified within the school improvement plan. We agreed that this could be improved by ensuring that the question, 'so what impact has that had?' is always asked following a statement of an action. We also agreed that leaders would be able to better evidence impact if the targets for improving students' outcomes were more clearly linked to actions and success criteria identified for leadership and management.

Members of the IEB have been selected for their expertise and experience across the key priorities of the school. They have a clear view of the school's performance and know what needs to be done to achieve the required improvement. They are well placed to challenge as well as support leaders because of this. Although only two meetings have been held so far, there is already evidence that members are effective in ensuring that they get the information they need in the format they need. They are ready, able and willing to gather relevant information independently so that they are not reliant on this being provided by senior leaders. Moreover, they have the skills to analyse and interpret evidence themselves. However, although the school has now begun to evaluate the impact of additional support provided on improving students' progress, the required review of pupil premium funding has not yet been completed.

The IEB is taking an active role in working with the Department for Education to source a sponsor prior to converting to academy status.

External support

The local authority acted quickly to identify the need for an IEB following the section 5 inspection. However, this was not up and running until September. Similarly, and as noted above, the programme for external support and challenge has only got underway this term. This has contributed to reducing the school's ability to make the early rapid progress required. However, the commissioned weekly support from a local leader of education is effective and the regular review and challenge now in place from local authority officers is beginning to have an impact on increasing the capacity of school leaders to improve standards.