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Mr Colin Short
Headteacher
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Reddish Vale Road
Stockport
Cheshire
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Dear Mr Short

Special measures monitoring inspection of Reddish Vale High School

Following my visit with David Woodhouse, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 15 and 16 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 February 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 am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Corporate Director, Services to People for Stockport.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching to ensure that all students, particularly those eligible for support from the pupil premium funding, those who have special educational needs and the most-able students, achieve well, especially in English and mathematics and particularly in Key Stage 4, by:
 - using information that relates to students' progress to plan activities that match the need of all learners
 - providing appropriate support as well as much more challenge so that all students make the progress of which they are capable
 - raising the expectations of teachers as to the quality and quantity of work that should be produced by students
 - consistently providing clear guidance on how students can improve their work and making certain that students respond appropriately to that guidance
 - providing more opportunities for students to think for themselves, deepen their understanding and become more enthusiastic about learning.

- Urgently improve the safety of students, by:
 - ensuring there are robust and accurate systems for tracking attendance, both at the start of the day and within lessons
 - increasing students' attendance and reducing persistent absence, particularly for those who attend alternative provision, those students supported by the pupil premium and those with special educational needs
 - ensuring safeguarding arrangements for those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable to bullying and discrimination, for example, and/or that those attending off-site provision are secure, including ensuring that students have sufficient regard for their safety when they leave the site at the end of the school day
 - making certain that all groups of students, including those whose circumstances makes them vulnerable to bullying, and their parents, are confident that bullying is dealt with robustly.

- Improve the behaviour of students in lessons and around the school and reduce exclusions by:
 - encouraging students to have a positive attitude to their learning, including being punctual to the start of lessons
 - ensuring that staff consistently apply the school's behaviour policy, both inside and outside the classroom.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - using information that the school has on students' progress and outcomes more accurately in order to check and understand exactly how well the school is doing
 - ensuring the procedures for checking the quality of teaching are robust and that everyone has a clear understanding of what good and outstanding learning looks like
 - making certain that the performance management system is having sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching and that pay progression for staff is robustly linked to the outcomes for all students
 - making senior leaders more accountable for the outcomes of students
 - ensuring governors understand data so that they can accurately check the progress of all key groups for themselves
 - improving the way that governors and senior leaders check and understand the financial situation of the school.

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 governance may be improved.

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

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and consultant headteacher, other senior leaders, groups of pupils and members of the governing body. The inspection team paid particular attention to middle leadership and the progress of current pupils.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the governors and the local authority have commissioned a consultant headteacher to work alongside the headteacher. A total of 26 teachers have left the academy and 16 new teachers have joined. Those who have left or are leaving at the end of this term include the head of English and the second in the English department, the head of mathematics, and the head of science. A new head of science joined the school in September 2015, and new heads of English and mathematics are due to take up their posts in January 2016.

Outcomes for pupils

The 2015 examination results were extremely disappointing for the academy. The proportion of pupils that achieved five GCSEs at A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, fell to below the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. This is due in part to anomalies in the poor success rate of many pupils who were entered for the IGCSE English examination. A large proportion of the pupils that received an 'unclassified' grade in the IGCSE English written paper had achieved A and B grades in other subjects, including those that require good literacy skills such as history and geography.

The percentage of pupils that made expected and more than expected levels of progress in English and mathematics also fell to below the government's current floor standards. This has highlighted concerns about the accuracy of the teachers' assessments of pupils' progress. Despite having their assessments externally verified, they were largely inaccurate.

Boys and girls make similar levels of progress, except in English where the girls continue to do better than the boys. The achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers in school has narrowed in some subjects, but widened in others and has widened against non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. Departments have plans in place to address these gaps in achievement but the academy was unable to provide evidence of impact at this stage.

Although national figures for 2015 show that Year 11 pupils at Reddish Vale made significantly less progress than similar pupils nationally, the overall figures indicate an improving trend, with the academy achieving its highest ever progress score. Academy information shows that the current Year 11 pupils are making improved levels of progress in line with their targets for 2106, although the predicted outcomes remain below those expected of similar pupils nationally.

The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to G grades improved considerably in 2015 from well below, to in line with, national figures. Pupils continue to achieve well in the performing arts and humanities subjects, as do the small numbers that are entered for languages examinations.

The levels of progress made by current pupils, as shown in lessons and in their books, vary considerably between and within subjects, depending on the quality of the teaching.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains too variable, even within departments. For example, inspectors observed innovative and engaging teaching in mathematics that encouraged pupils to think for themselves, challenged their growing understanding and consequently deepened their learning. But they also observed mathematics teaching that spoon-fed pupils with the 'right' answers, leading to a shallow grasp of essential mathematical concepts.

In lessons where pupils were seen to be making effective progress, the teachers knew their class very well, and were able to judge the levels of learning taking place and adapt activities and resources accordingly. However, in some of the less successful lessons, pupils' progress was hindered by the teachers' narrow focus on developing their skills whilst limiting the extent to which they could use their imaginations, innovate, and explore topics in depth.

Some teachers have high expectations of the quality of work in pupils' books and others do not. Where expectations are low, the work is sometimes untidy and incomplete, providing little evidence of learning and progress over time.

Since September 2015, much work has taken place to improve the quality of teachers' assessments and to improve the accuracy of their predictions. Senior leaders now rigorously oversee the work of departments. This includes the scrutiny of pupils' work in books and regular discussion about the performance of individual pupils. Pupils who are judged to be underperforming are offered bespoke extra support to help them catch up.

Teachers value the introduction of the weekly 90-minute teaching and learning training sessions where they are able to discuss effective teaching methods and are beginning to share good practice.

Strategies to improve literacy are having a positive impact; in Key Stage 3, the average reading age has increased by approximately 14 months. Of the pupils who met with inspectors, those in Key Stage 3 were more likely to read independently and for pleasure than those in Key Stage 4.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Systems are in place to ensure that pupils are safeguarded effectively. Through the introduction of more discrete teaching of personal, social, health and economic education, the academy is taking steps to safeguard pupils against, among other things, unhealthy relationships, the misuse of drugs and alcohol, and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDs. In citizenship lessons pupils have learned about democracy and the rule of law, studying issues such as the prevention of religious and political radicalisation, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. Pupils told inspectors that there are many teachers, mentors and other adults in the school whom they feel confident to turn to for advice and guidance in matters relating to their personal health and well-being.

In response to a wide range of academy initiatives, overall attendance has improved over the past three years. The percentage of pupils that are persistently absent has also fallen but remains considerably higher than the national average for similar schools. In recent years, the majority of those who are persistently absent from the academy are the most disadvantaged pupils and those with disabilities or special educational needs. The attendance gap between these pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers remains too wide and is having a detrimental impact on their progress and outcomes.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is, for the most part, good. However, pupils in Key Stage 3 reported some low-level disruption in lessons. The pupils who met with inspectors said that very little bullying takes place and where in the past, some pupils were victims of name-calling in relation to their appearance, interests or ability, this was no longer tolerated.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Minutes of the governing body show governors making a very robust response to the disappointing summer examination results. They ask very challenging questions of the headteacher and senior staff, and have swiftly appointed a consultant headteacher to support the senior leadership team. The academy has also successfully appointed new heads of English, mathematics and science and extended the leadership team by appointing teachers to it with a strong track record of successful outcomes. It is for this reason, and because overall progress measures show a continuing improving trend, that the judgement has been made that leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal from special measures.

The quality assurance of middle leadership has been enhanced by the regular scrutiny of their work by senior leaders. However, leaders and managers are yet to analyse assessment data sharply enough to judge accurately whether underachieving groups are benefiting from changes to teaching methods and other initiatives.

The academy has recently updated its improvement planning and self-evaluation documents. Whilst the plans rightly focus on the areas for improvement identified by inspection teams, they do not evaluate sufficiently well the impact of actions on pupil outcomes. They focus only on the completion of actions. It is also unclear who is responsible for evaluating the success of an action and whether they are different from those leading on the action.

The pupil premium funds have not been targeted sufficiently well at the needs of disadvantaged pupils, with much of the funding being used to support the overall teaching budget. Individual departments now bid for a share of the funding to support disadvantaged pupils but robust systems to evaluate the impact of initiatives are not yet in place.

External support

Since the last monitoring inspection, the academy has appointed a consultant headteacher for one day a week, and commissioned reviews of the English, mathematics and physical education departments. The consultant headteacher has supported the academy in its improvement planning and self-evaluation, although it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this.

Priorities for further improvement:

- ensure that improvement planning focuses more specifically on outcomes for pupils
- analyse progress data better, particularly in relation to underachieving groups, so that their needs may be met more effectively
- share best practice within the academy so that pupils have a better chance of achieving their potential.