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Mrs Maria Nightingale
Principal
Irlam and Cadishead College
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Dear Mrs Nightingale

Special measures monitoring inspection of Irlam and Cadishead College

Following my visit with Tim Long, Ofsted Inspector and Fiona Burke-Jackson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 2–3 February 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2015

- Raise standards and secure good or better progress for all groups of students, across all subjects, in all year groups, particularly in English and mathematics, by improving the quality of teaching so it is at least good, by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and ensuring all teaching engages students well and makes clear what is expected of them in their learning
 - ensuring teachers' assessments are regular and accurate in order to inform effectively their planning for students' progress in lessons and over time
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve so that all students, particularly the most able, receive appropriate challenge and support when needed
 - making sure teachers consistently let students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, give them opportunity to act on this advice, and systematically check that learning has progressed
 - making sure students have learned securely what they need to, before moving on to new learning
 - making sure students take more responsibility for their learning, through improving their punctuality to college and promoting their eagerness to learn
 - sharing the good practice that already exists in pockets, across the college more widely.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership at all levels, including governance, in order to improve students' achievement by:
 - developing a secure, reliable and robust systems for checking on the progress of students across the college
 - ensuring there is effective support for all leaders, especially middle leaders and governors, to address the gaps in their skills and understanding of their roles in order that they can check effectively on what is working well or not and so make the necessary improvements
 - making sure all staff have consistently high expectations of students' behaviour and attitudes to learning, including their prompt arrival to lessons
 - implementing the changes planned for the curriculum so that it better meets the needs of students in the main school and sixth form and drives forward the development of students' literacy and mathematics skills in all areas
 - ensuring that the plans to address the underachievement of different groups of students are driven well across the college, that appropriate actions are taken and that their impact is checked on a regular basis.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2–3 February 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders, subject leaders, progress and development leaders, groups of pupils, and two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, the Chief Executive and an improvement adviser of Salford Academy Trust. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons, including three observations conducted with the vice-principal. They visited an assembly and several tutorial sessions. In addition, they scrutinised a range of documents, including minutes of meetings of the transition steering group and the governing body, the school's teaching handbook and behaviour policy, and the Principal's evaluation of the school's progress in implementing its action plan. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils were considered and the school's website was evaluated. Inspectors sampled the books of a cross-section of pupils from Key Stages 3 and 4.

Context

The executive headteacher and head of school who were in post at the time of the last monitoring inspection left the school, as planned, at the end of the summer term 2015. A vice-principal was seconded from another academy within the Salford Academy Trust, in June 2015. A new Principal took up post in September 2015 and will be the substantive leader of the school when it becomes an academy. A new Chair of the Governing Body was elected in December 2015.

A further 14 teachers and eight members of support staff have left the school since the previous monitoring inspection and five teachers have joined it. A vice-principal and two assistant Principals are currently absent. The subject leaders for science and English are leaving the school for new posts at the end of the spring term and the school is seeking to recruit their replacements. There is currently no curriculum leader for mathematics and this post is also being advertised. The number of pupils on the school roll has declined to 748, of whom 28 are in the sixth form. No learners will be recruited to the sixth form for autumn 2016. After a full consultation process, concluded in May 2015, the decision was taken for the school to be sponsored by Salford Academy Trust. The school is due to close, and then reopen as an academy, in April 2016.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's results were unacceptably low in 2015. Only 35% of pupils attained five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A*–C, including English and mathematics. Attainment declined in English and remained low in mathematics. Pupils left the school with standards that were significantly lower than those found nationally in art and design, business studies, graphic products, resistant materials, English literature, geography, information and communication technology, French, physical education

and core science. The rates of progress made by pupils from their varying starting points were low, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Outcomes for learners in the sixth form were very poor in both academic and vocational subjects.

The school's information, based on teachers' assessments of pupils' work, indicates that progress is starting to accelerate in English but that it remains stubbornly low in mathematics, where discontinuity in teaching has prevailed.

The school's work to improve pupils' literacy skills has stalled. The library has not been used properly since the librarian left the school in the autumn term. Shelves are cluttered and arrangements for borrowing are unclear. A reading programme to which the school had previously committed substantial resources has been discontinued with the exception of a small group of pupils. Their reading skills show signs of some improvement but they are not catching up quickly enough.

Those pupils who spoke with inspectors did not, in the main, perceive themselves as readers; they do not read regularly and do not feel that their reading is celebrated or monitored by the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There is too much variability in the quality of teaching. Although expectations are laid out in the school's handbook, these are not rigorously adhered to and quality assurance processes are not robust enough to secure compliance and consistency. Pupils, particularly in Years 7 to 9, test the boundaries too frequently and teachers do not pre-empt this well enough; they do not, for instance, make clear their expectations of when tasks should be completed in silence. This leads to learning time being lost in lessons where pupils' attention is allowed to wander and when distractions diminish their concentration.

Teachers do not plan systematically to take account of the needs of different groups of pupils and this leads to insufficient challenge for the most able and insufficient support for the least able.

Leaders have introduced a homework timetable, but the setting and completion of homework remain inconsistent. According to pupils, 'how much homework you get depends on who teaches you'.

There is very little evidence of pupils' work displayed throughout the school or of pupils being shown excellent work to raise their aspirations. Some large display boards have been purchased but they are empty.

New student planners have been introduced for pupils. They are well designed but the expectation that they are produced by pupils in all lessons is not followed through; consequently they are not effective in helping pupils to organise themselves.

Most pupils' books are marked regularly, but there is little evidence of pupils being expected to act on the feedback provided by their teachers. The school's marking policy is not followed across subjects with regard to spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils' written work continues to contain too many inaccuracies that they do not know how to correct for themselves. The work of pupils whose learning is affected by teachers' absence sometimes remains unmarked for long periods of time.

There is some very effective teaching in the school. In English, a class of Year 9 pupils wrote poignant letters to a newspaper editor following a discussion about the Holocaust. The teacher's thoughtful questioning, along with the judicious balance of activities, underpinned pupils' excellent progress. Many teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and very knowledgeable, as shown in a physics lesson where the teacher's creativity and high expectations enabled pupils to tease out subtle concepts about wave diffraction and to relate them to modern technology. The school's ability to share and build on good practice in teaching is at an early stage of development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils spoken to by inspectors expressed a view that behaviour has improved since the appointment of the new Principal. They understand the new stepped approach to behaviour management that defines appropriate responses to misdemeanours of varying seriousness. Serious poor behaviour has been rigorously challenged, leading to an increase in the rate of exclusion. Pupils do, however, find that some teachers are 'stricter' than others, for instance in their response to incomplete homework. They feel that the occurrence of disruptive behaviour is dependent on which class they are in and who is teaching them. Inspectors' observations confirmed pupils' views: there is still too much disruption to learning in the form of off-task behaviour, social chatter and purposeless distraction. They also observed some more instances of open defiance.

The positive link between effective teaching, respectful behaviour and enthusiastic attitudes to learning was apparent in some lessons, particularly at Key Stage 4.

Some pupils have insufficient care for their environment, as shown by the littered plastic drink bottles discarded in the dining area after lunch. On occasions, this indifference is a feature of pupils' exercise books. In some cases, standards of presentation have declined since the start of the autumn term, exacerbated when teachers have been absent or have not marked books regularly. While many pupils wear their uniforms smartly, some disregard the rules and are not consistently challenged to conform.

Pupils' attendance was below the national average in 2015 and the proportion of pupils persistently absent from school was higher than that found nationally. Attendance is not improving quickly enough. Absence figures have been compounded recently by the fixed-term exclusions of several girls in Year 9. Some pupils continue to arrive late to lessons.

While most pupils manage their own safety, some do not routinely wear goggles or tied aprons when completing practical activities where this level of protection is necessary.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new Principal and vice-principal have introduced a range of measures designed to improve teaching and thereby raise attainment. They are under no illusions about the depth of the difficulties the school faces and are working hard with their partners to bring about change. The school has been through turbulent times and a greater degree of stability is now apparent. Many staff who spoke with inspectors were positive about the work of the Principal and vice-principal, particularly with regard to their stance on pastoral management and their optimism for the future of the school. The arrival of the substantive Principal has signalled a step change with regard to school improvement, including the introduction of a robust system for teachers' appraisal and a forum for parents to provide their feedback on the progress being made by the school.

Although improvements are being made, there is a lack of urgency to improve teaching and learning. New procedures are not being consistently implemented, and so there is not enough impact on teaching and achievement. The school's improvement has been hindered by staff absence, including prolonged absences among members of the senior leadership team. These have affected the school's ability to develop the skills of subject leaders. Leaders have not been able to fill all the gaps that have been left when staff have been absent from their posts; consequently, the whole-school leadership of literacy has floundered. The school's strategy to provide effective careers information and guidance is a positive move but has only recently begun. The school's work to support pupils with special educational needs is starting to improve due to the recent appointment of a special educational needs coordinator following a period of disarray.

Leaders recognise that while there is some good and effective teaching in school, there is also a considerable amount of practice that requires improvement. Some inadequate teaching persists. Appropriate support plans have been put in place for individual teachers and these are monitored on a regular basis. Senior leaders are aware of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across subjects but have not been able to share good practice effectively, partly because ongoing staff absence has reduced their capacity to work on the school's multiple priorities simultaneously.

In an attempt to improve teaching, senior leaders provided staff with two additional training days to focus on developing teachers' skills. Teachers report that these days were valuable. In making this provision, school leaders reduced the number of teaching days for pupils to a level below that required for maintained schools; this was done with the consent of the Director of Children's Services for Salford. The strategy for rolling out the teaching enhancement programme has not been made clear enough to all staff; consequently there is uncertainty as to its intended impact on teaching and outcomes for pupils.

Subject leaders have not had sufficient opportunity or direction to develop their skills, although most have an appetite to do so. They are unclear about how quality assurance is managed and the requirements of their role in this regard. They are not yet in a position to secure and sustain improvement in their subjects. The school's planned programme of training for subject leaders in observing and monitoring teaching and learning has not been completed due to staff absence. There are, however, some positive developments, such as in mathematics where a learning leader has started to analyse pupils' performance in tests at a more sophisticated level that enables teachers to provide specific additional teaching of topics to identified pupils who need help with particular concepts. The Principal has enabled teachers to attend training, including that delivered by examination boards, in order that they become conversant with the demands of new syllabuses. These opportunities have not always been provided in the past.

Tutor groups of mixed-age pupils have been discontinued and the former heads of house now have new roles as progress and development leaders assigned to specific year groups. They welcome this change; they now have better scope to understand and meet the needs of pupils within their groups rather than dealing solely with behaviour issues. They welcome the information that is now shared with them. Many staff and pupils positively endorse improvements in the pastoral leadership of the school. Initiatives such as the 'praise postcards' sent home to the parents of worthy pupils by the Principal are helping to boost pupils' morale.

The school has invested in improving the information that teachers receive about pupils' attainment, including progress from their starting points. A consultant has produced detailed information about the achievement of cohorts and groups within the school. Some confusion remains among subject leaders and teachers as to what this wealth of information reveals and how it should be used to improve outcomes for pupils.

There is a specific drive to raise the achievement of pupils currently in Year 11. This includes, from January 2016, the regular mentoring of groups of pupils by leaders, preceded by meetings with their parents. The initiative is designed to help remove barriers to learning and has the potential to support raised achievement, but as yet it is too early to evaluate impact.

Leadership of the sixth form has been weak for some time. The performance of sixth-form learners in 2015 was very low, and the decision to cease recruitment of learners is appropriate. Leaders have raised their expectations of those sixth formers who remain at the school, including by challenging endemic poor attendance.

The new Principal has continued the work begun by the interim headteacher to build positive relationships with local primary schools. Pupils in Year 7 brought their best piece of written work from Year 6 to school in order to ensure that teachers of English were aware of their existing skills on which to build. This has helped to raise teachers' awareness of pupils' capabilities and improve transition.

The governing body expresses a strong commitment to improving the school and is continuing to work in partnership with Salford Academy Trust and the local authority to overcome the various difficulties that leaders face. Governors have actively sought the views of pupils about improvements, and make themselves available for staff.

There is optimism about the school's future as an academy within Salford Academy Trust; however, delays to the completion of transition, due to legal procedures, have resulted in frustration. The transition steering group, which includes members of the governing body, representatives from the local authority and members of the Salford Academy Trust, ensures that the appropriate processes are followed to secure academisation, so that the eventual transfer from the local authority is as smooth as possible.

Governors have not ensured that the school's website is compliant with government requirements with regard to information that must be in the public domain. This includes an evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding; neither evaluation has been completed. Leaders have identified how pupil premium funding is to be spent for pupils currently on roll.

External support

The school is drawing on a blend of support from the local authority and Salford Academy Trust. This partnership working, coordinated through the transition steering group, has successfully established a structure for leadership and governance when the academy opens.

The local authority has brokered support, including from a specialist leader of education from a local teaching school. This support has been valued by the English department, particularly for the review and adaptation of schemes of work and the provision of advice to the inexperienced curriculum leader.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services for Salford continues to work with the transition steering group and ensures that the school has access to specialist services from the local authority.

Salford Academy Trust has recruited the Principal and seconded the vice-principal from a partner academy to boost leadership capacity. In addition, it has provided an assistant principal for the spring term to improve the curriculum, a data and assessment consultant, and a specialist consultant for careers education, information advice and guidance. A comprehensive review of safeguarding has been conducted by Salford Academy Trust and its outcomes have been acted upon by the new Principal.