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Ms Jackie Cooper
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Cooper

Special measures monitoring inspection of William Allitt School

Following my visit with Emma Ing, Senior Her Majesty's Inspector and Sally Smith, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 26–27 January 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 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 that took place in April 2014. 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 Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, in order to accelerate progress and raise standards across the school, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what all students, and particularly the most able, can achieve
 - teachers check regularly on students' progress and adapt their teaching as necessary to ensure that all students are challenged appropriately by the work they are set
 - marking and feedback are consistently helpful in moving students up to the next level of attainment
 - teachers check that students have acted on the guidance they are given through marking
 - all low-level disruptive behaviour is eliminated from lessons
 - teachers across all subjects develop students' literacy skills by regularly correcting any spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes.

- Improve achievement in English and mathematics, particularly that of boys, students supported by the pupil premium and the most-able students, by:
 - providing more challenging work in all subjects for the most-able students
 - identifying early any students whose reading is weak and providing more frequent and effective support so that they can catch up with their peers
 - checking students' progress in writing more frequently, and providing more opportunities for students to develop their skills by writing at length in other subjects
 - giving greater attention in mathematics to the development of students' key skills in calculation and problem-solving
 - ensuring that disabled students and those who have special educational needs, who are not covered by the enhanced provision offered by the school, make the same good progress as those who are.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - making leaders', including subject leaders', evaluations of the school's and their own effectiveness more rigorous
 - reviewing the use of early entry for GCSE
 - providing better support for students whose main language is not English
 - raising expectations by making all students' targets more challenging throughout the school
 - ensuring that subject leaders' plans give greater emphasis to improving the progress made by different groups of students
 - ensuring that leaders check more frequently on the impact of the measures being taken to bring about improvement.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 January 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher; the deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers; the Chair of the Governing Body; the subject leaders of mathematics, science and English; a representative of the local authority and groups of pupils from all year groups. Inspectors also held conversations with members of staff and pupils and observed the behaviour of pupils in and out of lessons. One inspector listened to some pupils read.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, one assistant headteacher has left the school and his areas of responsibility have been shared between the two deputy headteachers. Leaders have appointed three mentors to provide some pupils with one-to-one support. Seven new members of staff joined the school at the start of this academic year.

Leaders recently presented to staff a proposal for staffing restructure.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders acknowledge that the results for Year 11 pupils in 2015 were disappointing. Improvements were made in the proportions of pupils gaining five GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, and those making expected progress in English and mathematics. However, these proportions remain significantly below average. The proportion of pupils making more than expected progress has declined in both English and mathematics. Pupils with middle and higher starting points in particular are not making the progress of which they are capable.

Disadvantaged pupils made progress at similar rates to other pupils in the school. The gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers persists. The gap in achievement between boys and girls in Key Stage 4 has narrowed, however boys' and girls' achievement continues to be significantly below average.

The school's own achievement information indicates that there are some examples of pupils across the school who are making progress at rates close to, or above, average rates. Similarly, that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others is closing. This is not a consistent trend across all year groups and subjects.

Initiatives to boost pupils' reading skills are successful. Pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 speak enthusiastically about the opportunities they have to read regularly in school

and how this is encouraged at home. They enjoy the tasks they complete to show them how much they read and how their reading has improved.

Work in books indicates that pupils continue to develop their problem-solving and calculation skills in mathematics. Teachers increasingly promote literacy skills in all lessons as well as the use of technical vocabulary. Teachers often pay close attention to the wording of questions to ensure that pupils understand the requirements of a set task.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers do not routinely use achievement information to plan appropriate challenge for pupils. All too often, pupils remain inactive in lessons after completing a task they have found too easy and while their teacher focuses attention, for example, on question and answer sessions with a small number of pupils. Teachers often demonstrate good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about their subjects and this captures their pupils' attention. However, in some cases, teachers' questioning is not developed well enough in order to support pupils to apply their new understanding or learning in different contexts. In some lessons seen by inspectors, for example in science and humanities, teachers skilfully led pupils' discussions of a topic and used helpful questions to enable pupils to develop their reasoning. When teachers refer to how questions are marked this helps pupils to be clear on what they need to do to achieve the highest grades.

The quality of marking and feedback continues to vary across departments. While there are common features, as required by the school policy such as the use of 'what went well (WWW)' and 'even better if (EBI)' in many books, there is not a consistent approach to key priorities such as improvements to pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation. There are some examples of high-quality written feedback provided by some teachers in some subjects. Pupils do not routinely respond to this, but when they do so productively, this helps them to make better progress. Pupils say that marking has helped them to improve their work in some subjects. They also give examples of when their work has been rarely marked, if at all, this academic year.

Teachers continue to use teaching strategy sheets, which show that they refer to information about pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour in their planning. They use this information effectively to plan the most productive seating and grouping of pupils to promote engagement and attentiveness. Teachers continue to know their pupils well and generally there are positive relationships between pupils and with their teachers in lessons.

Pupils clearly take pride in their work. There are frequent examples of pupils completing high-quality extended writing across different subjects. There remain examples of long passages of work with no acknowledgement from their teachers. It is a reflection of some pupils' resilience and ambition that they are not discouraged but continue to complete homework tasks in some subjects although it is rarely taken in by their teacher.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are generally responsive to their teachers' requests and expectations in lessons. However, low-level disruption, such as off-task chatting and pupils interrupting their teachers, persists and pupils from all year groups report that this is not uncommon in lessons. When seen by the inspection team, low-level disruption occurs when teachers do not have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and conduct. In some cases, teachers disregard poor behaviour. Pupils recognise that this happens in some lessons, and feel that teachers vary in the way in which they give out behaviour points.

Attendance continues to be above average and persistent absence has reduced overall. Some groups of pupils such as disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs or disability are absent more often than average. Leaders know well the individual circumstances of pupils that lead to poor attendance. Leaders boost communication with parents and work extensively with outside agencies to support families. This helps some pupils improve their attendance to school. Activities and clubs to help groups of pupils to improve their attendance are in too early a stage to have led to sustained improvements.

The rate of fixed-term exclusions remains above average although has reduced slightly due to leaders' more vigilant tracking of behavioural incidents and prompter interventions.

Pupils value the programme of enrichment activities that have helped to raise their aspirations. Year 11 pupils feel well informed through assemblies, visiting speakers and trips and they feel confident making decisions about their next steps.

All safeguarding checks are in place and meet statutory requirements.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders implemented appropriate policies and strategies promptly to address areas for improvement stipulated in the previous inspection report. However, since the last monitoring visit, leaders' drive for improvement has lost momentum. Despite their hard work and ambition, the impact of new systems has been limited.

Leaders recognise that the improvements in outcomes for pupils expected in 2015 were not made. They have analysed carefully the reasons for this. The actions that they have taken to improve the accuracy of predictions of pupils' results, for example in English and design and technology, were not successful. The focus on improving the proportion of pupils gaining a grade C in English and mathematics meant that those capable of higher grades were not sufficiently challenged and did not do as well as they should have done.

Leaders' expectations for the improvements needed in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are known by staff but the extent to which expected practice is in place varies significantly across the school. While training and higher expectations have meant that some teachers have improved their teaching, leaders have not persisted strongly enough to ensure that all teachers follow the school's policies. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not improving overall and pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders were aware of inconsistencies in teachers' use of the marking and feedback policy at the time of the last monitoring visit. They agree that this variation within and between subject areas continues. Leaders have not ensured that systems to improve the quality of marking and feedback have been effective.

Leaders have been successful in raising pupils' aspirations. Targets are more challenging so that pupils aim to make good progress. Pupils know their targets and are keen to raise them further. Leaders are providing more support and opportunities out of lessons for the most-able pupils to help them achieve their target grades. However, this support and encouragement is too dependent on interventions outside of lessons. Despite this being recognised as a priority at previous monitoring inspections, and appropriate training provided for teachers, leaders have not secured routine integration of challenge for pupils into teachers' planning.

The system for tracking the effectiveness of different types of support given to pupils is now established. Leaders use this well to review strategies so that more effective support is provided, for example, for disadvantaged pupils. As a result of this evaluation, leaders have appointed mentors to provide one-to-one support for some pupils in and out of lessons to help them overcome barriers to their learning and make better progress. It is too early to see if this work will lead to a sustained improvement in outcomes for these pupils.

Subject leaders feel well supported by their senior line managers and increasingly work with them to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their departments. They are aware of areas that continue to need improvement. However, for reasons such as lack of experience and opportunity, subject leaders are not holding individual teachers to account when their teaching needs to get better.

Pupils have noticed that leaders are quick to follow up and resolve behavioural incidents and that this has improved with the introduction of the new tracking system. However, the extent of poor behaviour described by some pupils does not match the school's records, indicating a lack of consistency in teachers' reporting of incidents and in their use of the school's behaviour policy.

While the school's training programme continues to focus appropriately on priority areas, such as challenge, questioning and behaviour management, the extent to which this is applied by teachers to their planning is limited.

There are indications that leaders do not always have an accurate view of how the school is perceived by pupils and staff. Some staff are unclear about leaders' specific roles and responsibilities and so there is a lack of clarity about to whom they are directly accountable, for example for the quality of their teaching. There are, too frequently, examples of teachers not following the policies and practice required of them in order for the school to improve at the rate that is needed.

Pockets of excellent practice exist in the school. Leaders need to act urgently to draw on the example set by those who work hard to fulfil what leaders expect of them and are committed to improving outcomes for pupils. Leaders should not accept anything less.

Governors remain dedicated to fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. They have organised more external training appropriately and have forged helpful links with different subject areas. The Chair of the Governing Body continues to be highly supportive to the headteacher and is aware of, and is quick to challenge, the lack of improvements across the school.

External support

The extent to which support organised through the local authority has been effective is limited. Officers of the authority continue to provide support to the leadership of English and to facilitate helpful links with a number of local schools. Through its monitoring visits, the local authority generally has an accurate view of the strengths and areas that continue to need improvement in the school. The local authority acknowledges that there is more work to be done to achieve the improvements that are needed. In particular, advice and support are essential to enable the leadership team to address these areas with the urgency that is required.