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Mr Stuart Tonks
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Dear Mr Tonks

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wilnecote High School

Following my visit with Robert Steed, Ofsted Inspector, and Josie Leese, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23–24 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). However, you should contact the monitoring inspector to discuss any circumstances where the school may wish to appoint NQTs.

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

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2014

- Improve teaching to at least good, particularly in English and mathematics, so that achievement improves significantly by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and reducing the amount that requires improvement through rigorous and accurate monitoring and prompt action that is evaluated carefully for impact
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations and are supported to use assessment information effectively to plan lessons that build rapidly on students' achievements from their starting points and provide increased challenge, particularly for middle ability students and disadvantaged students
 - sharing more effectively existing good practice to improve teachers' questioning so that students are challenged to develop their oral responses, using subject-related language where appropriate
 - improving the quality of marking so that there are higher expectations of both the quality and quantity of work set and students know exactly what to do to make progress.
- Improve the management of behaviour so that it is good in all lessons and at all times of the day around the academy by:
 - ensuring that all teachers deal with low level disruption in lessons effectively and promptly
 - increasing supervision at break and lunch times, particularly in those areas where students are at some distance from academy buildings.
- As a matter of urgency, improve safety around the building by:
 - carrying out an audit of repairs and safe storage needed, acting rapidly on this information.
- Take rapid action to improve the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders rapidly and rigorously address weaknesses in teaching and learning, taking all appropriate evidence into account, so that judgements made are accurate and lead to effective action
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders have a clear understanding of what constitutes good achievement and therefore an accurate view of the academy's performance in comparison to other schools nationally
 - improving leadership of English and mathematics, so that those responsible have a clearer view of what needs to be done to improve students' progress and take an active role in raising achievement in their subjects
 - evaluating the way in which pupil premium can be more effectively used so that it has a significantly greater impact on closing the gap between these students and others in the school
 - ensuring that the governing body more rigorously holds academy leaders to account for the quality of teaching and achievement.

An external review of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 23–24 February 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents and information about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the headteacher of The Rawlett School. Parts of 28 lessons were observed, some jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors visited tutor and registration periods and observed pupils around the school at non-lesson times.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the following changes to staffing have taken place: one member of the senior leadership team has stepped down to a middle leader role; one middle leader has undergone capability proceedings and is about to leave the school; three teachers have left the school, one following capability proceedings and two to take up positions elsewhere; one new teacher of mathematics has been appointed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior and middle leaders are now much more confident and accurate in their view of the school's performance in comparison to other schools nationally. There is now greater focus on succession planning in order to identify and develop potential senior and middle leaders and thus improve the capacity of leadership. Performance management is more rigorous and ensures all staff are held to account for how well they perform in the context of their particular roles in the school.

Senior leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are accurate. A tightly structured and transparent approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is now in place. This enables weaknesses, such as those identified in science, design and technology, and English, to be systematically addressed and tailored support to be introduced more promptly. Faculty improvement partners and regular six-weekly subject reviews are providing better support and challenge for faculty leaders. The greater accountability of faculty and senior leaders for pupils' performance, plus greater use of external cross moderation, means that assessment is now a more accurate reflection of pupils' achievement.

Middle leadership in some faculties is strong, for example in art, ICT and business, humanities and mathematics – and this is reflected in the improving quality of teaching and in the progress pupils are making in these areas. Leadership in English has improved considerably and its impact on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress in English indicates a rapidly improving picture. Despite these positive features, middle leadership across the school is still too variable. In some areas where it has been weak, such as science, improvements in the quality of teaching and in pupils' achievement are too slow. Senior leaders are now taking effective action to deal with underperformance at this level of leadership.

Monitoring of pupils' progress is regular and detailed. However, systems in place are not always sufficiently 'joined up' to provide leaders with the information they need to bring about more rapid improvement. For example:

- Regular monitoring identifies those pupils who are underperforming and enables staff to introduce interventions and support promptly. The positive impact of these interventions can be seen in relation to individual pupils' progress. However, school leaders are not easily able to analyse this information in order to judge whether their interventions are having a positive impact on the overall performance of different groups.
- The monitoring of pupils' performance in English and in mathematics and subsequent interventions are not linked together. This makes it more difficult for the school to minimise differences in achievement in these two subjects, and to ensure pupils do as well as possible in both subjects.

The monitoring and evaluation of the behaviour, attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils is still not sufficiently systematic or coherent to contribute effectively to closing existing gaps in achievement between these and other pupils.

The curriculum meets pupils' needs and includes a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. However, it is not clear how, when and where in the curriculum pupils are given appropriate opportunities to develop a strong understanding of fundamental British values.

Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Nonetheless, strategic leadership of safeguarding is not sharp enough. For example, while staff training meets minimum requirements, delivery of the most up-to-date training requirements, such as 'Prevent' training, has not been given the priority required.

Members of the governing body demonstrate increasing strength in both supporting and holding leaders to account. They have high expectations about the quality of education that should be provided by the school and regularly challenge leaders about the pace of change. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well and are very clear about its key priorities.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The school's monitoring records and work in pupils' books provide evidence that teachers have increasingly higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, and this was evident in lesson observations during the inspection. In certain subjects, good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching regularly involves challenging learning activities that fully engage pupils and enable them to make at least good progress from their starting points. However, this is not the case in all subjects. There is still too much variability in the quality of teaching over time, both across and within subjects, and too often opportunities to promote deeper engagement and bring about more rapid progress are not taken.

At times, assessment information about pupils is used effectively to direct support where necessary. However, this is not consistent across all subjects. Evidence from

lesson observations during the inspection reflected the school's own monitoring evidence about the level of challenge provided and the quality of teachers' questioning. For example, questioning is well targeted and challenging in mathematics, history and modern foreign languages lessons and pupils are encouraged to use subject-related language when appropriate. In weaker subjects, this is not the case. In stronger subjects, learning activities challenge pupils and maintain their interest and engagement. In weaker subjects, this is not the case and learning slows as too many pupils find the work too easy or too hard, resulting in a lack of engagement and sometimes low-level disruption.

Most teachers now follow the school's marking policy consistently. Pupils regularly spend time improving their work in response to teachers' feedback comments and are able to talk about how this improves their learning and their written work. However, not all pupils at Key Stage 4 know what their target grades are or understand what they could do to meet these.

Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the quality of teaching and learning by supporting individual pupils to become more independent learners and make the progress they should in their learning.

The use of tutor time is still too variable in terms of its contribution to pupils' learning because not all teachers ensure that pupils are fully engaged in the planned activities. Equally, registration time at the end of the day lacks a planned structure and thus is not always used in a productive way.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Despite the very narrow corridors, behaviour around the school is reasonably calm and pupils are generally courteous and respectful of each other and of staff. In many lessons, behaviour and attitudes are positive and contribute significantly to pupils' effective learning. However, low-level disruption is still present in too many lessons because some teachers fail to deal with it effectively. This reflects weaker leadership and inconsistent implementation of policies in this area.

Staff involved in supporting pupils who have special educational needs or disability are well trained and support relevant pupils well. They share information about pupils effectively with teaching staff and provide valuable advice and support to teaching staff and to parents about how to more effectively meet the learning needs of pupils who have particular medical and educational needs. The school's records indicate the positive impact of interventions for this group of pupils.

Pupils note that advice on how to keep themselves safe is provided in assemblies and in form time. They feel confident about their understanding of this and know who to talk to if they have any concerns. However, they are less clear about the meaning of British values and why these are important.

Outcomes for pupils

The standards Year 11 pupils are expected to reach in English and mathematics by

the end of the year indicate a significant improvement on previous years. These predictions are supported by information from the school's regular assessment points, and by the quality of learning over time noted in school monitoring records and that observed in lessons during the inspection.

The school's information about performance in other subjects, including modern foreign languages, humanities, ICT, art and drama, also indicate improvement. Evidence in school monitoring records note the positive impact of teaching on the quality of learning taking place, and this was reflected in lesson observations in these subjects during the inspection.

The performance of middle-ability pupils is improving and reflects the school's focus on developing the independence and resilience of these pupils as learners.

Despite these improvements, there is still too much variability in achievement between subjects and between individual groups of pupils. Although gaps in performance between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils both in the school and nationally are slowly narrowing, they remain far too wide and actions are not yet having a sufficiently rapid impact on narrowing them.

External support

External support, from the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) consultants and school-to-school support from The Rawlett School (a member of the AET), is making a valuable contribution to improving the capacity of leadership and helping to develop leaders' strategic skills. The impact of this can be seen in: the greater focus given to succession planning; the more rigorous approach to, and impact of, performance management; the improved accuracy of assessment as a result of external cross-moderation; improvements to teaching, learning and assessment as a result of the sharing of good practice and the specialist subject support, particularly in mathematics and English. Although not yet sufficiently improved, this support is ensuring that the school is moving forward. This continues to be a two-way process with staff from Wilnecote High School sharing their own good practice in, for example, mathematics, modern foreign languages and computing.