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14 March 2016

Mrs Jane Gotschel
Executive Headteacher
Lordswood Boys' School
Hagley Road
Birmingham
West Midlands
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Dear Mrs Gotschel

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lordswood Boys' School

Following my visit with Russell Hinton, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 9–10 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in English and mathematics, and thereby raise students' attainment and accelerate their progress, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what all students, and particularly the most able, are capable of achieving
 - ensuring teachers provide all students with activities that are appropriately challenging
 - making sure that, in all subjects, consistent clear advice is given to students about how to improve their work
 - diligently checking the progress of all groups of students, and especially those from minority ethnic groups, across the range of subjects
 - encouraging students to be confident in classroom discussion and to think more deeply when responding to questions
 - ensuring that, in all lessons, poor behaviour does not impede learning insisting that all teachers understand and effectively use systems for tracking the progress of students so that leaders at all levels have accurate information regarding students' progress
 - making sure that the teaching of writing and number skills is secure
 - making better use of pupil premium funds to close the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and others.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring all leaders and managers swiftly and effectively put agreed plans and policies into action
 - giving a high and urgent priority to implementing the school's programme for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
 - creating a clear, well understood and competently managed system for gathering and analysing information about students' progress
 - making sure that senior and subject leaders are equally rigorous in monitoring teaching and learning and challenging teachers about the performance of different groups of students, particularly disadvantaged students
 - providing students with the opportunities when they leave to follow a range of appropriate pathways into education, training and employment
 - ensuring that all governors have a thorough and detailed understanding of information about how well students are achieving

- ensuring that governors seek out parents' opinions about the school
- senior leaders and governors closely monitoring to help make the best use of the school's allocation of pupil premium funding.

■ Improve behaviour and safety, by:

- ensuring that all students are clear about how they should behave in class
- ensuring all staff consistently apply the school's systems of rewards and sanctions for students' behaviour
- encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning and raising their academic expectations
- improving systems of communication, particularly for risk assessment, so that they are always rigorous and there is careful monitoring to ensure students are kept safe at all times.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 9–10 February 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other leaders, and the Chair and one other member of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed 18 lessons, including two lessons that were observed jointly with senior leaders. Short visits were made to a further four lessons to look at the use of tutor time at Key Stage 3, and an inspector reviewed additional support for weak readers provided through 'applied learning'. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their work during lessons and asked them about their views of the school at break and lunchtime. An inspector also met with a group of pupils who had special educational needs or disability to find out their views on the quality of support they receive.

Context

Since the third monitoring inspection, there have been very few changes in staffing and the school is now experiencing stability in teaching staff. A new music teacher has been appointed so music continues to be available for pupils at Key Stage 3 and as an optional subject for GCSE. The deputy headteacher is acting as headteacher, as the headteacher is currently not in school. The school roll continues to decline and there are now fewer than 400 pupils in the school. Unless this declining trend can be halted, the long-term viability of the school is uncertain.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders who met with inspectors during the inspection demonstrate drive and commitment to improve the school. They listened carefully to feedback given at the end of the last inspection and have taken rapid and decisive action to address most of the weaknesses identified at that time. However, despite their best efforts, monitoring of teaching continues to be weak resulting in variability in the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders' well-meaning intentions show little impact and some are failing to have the desired outcome.

Systems, introduced in September, have continued to be developed with further changes being implemented in January. Many of these systems are so new that it is too soon to see if they are making any difference. For example, a new 10-week programme to support weak readers is halfway through so school leaders do not yet know if this is helping pupils to catch up quickly enough.

Ineffective form-time activities, seen at the last visit, continue. Form time, which takes up almost one hour of curriculum time each week, is not used well enough by some teachers, leading to inconsistencies in the experiences of pupils. The monitoring of this work by leaders lacks rigour. Although teachers are provided with resources to help them to teach the personal, social and health education (PSHE) themes planned for this time, expectations for teaching and the marking of pupils' work are not made clear by leaders. This leads to considerable variation in pupils' experiences. In the worst cases, teachers leave pupils to get on with the activities without teaching them and no attempt is made to mark their work, leading pupils to believe the PSHE course has no value. The achievement team carries out regular 'drop ins' to form time, to carry out checks on uniform and equipment, for example. However, the quality of teaching and learning goes unchecked and weak teaching is unchallenged.

Senior leaders' programme of 'rolling reviews', where leaders carry out checks on teaching and learning, provides a range of evidence which contributes towards leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching in the school. Checks on pupils' work in books are carried out jointly by subject and senior leaders and are helping to reduce inconsistencies seen in the school in the quality and frequency of marking. However, leaders do not use these opportunities to check if schemes of work are being followed by teachers or if the work set is actually at the right level of difficulty for pupils.

Senior leaders are not managing the performance of subject leaders rigorously enough. Some subject leaders do not consistently model high expectations of teaching through their own marking, or ensure that schemes of work are up to date or provide appropriate guidance to help teachers to teach topics. As a result, inspectors saw inconsistencies in teaching and learning within subjects and across the school. In mathematics, there is no scheme of work so teachers work through the text books with little thought as to how to support pupils in developing the skills they need to solve problems.

Driving improvements with a deficit budget has presented considerable challenges for leaders who have had to make difficult choices in deciding which improvements the school can afford to deliver. They have wisely prioritised actions to sustain the improvements to attendance and behaviour seen at the last visit, and have also funded improvements to resources to support pupils' learning and engagement.

Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school based on first-hand evidence from their visits to the school, discussions with pupils and also from information shared by senior leaders. They are under no illusions of the amount of work still required to improve the school. Senior leaders provide governors with a vast amount of information on pupils' attainment and progress, for all year groups in the school. This makes it difficult for governors to focus on the key headline figures they need to be able to see if the school is improving quickly enough. Governors know about the achievements of disadvantaged pupils but are not given

the information they need to help them to make comparisons with other pupils nationally, or to check if gaps in achievement are closing. Plans were discussed during the inspection to look at how this can be improved. Minutes of governors' meetings have improved and key questions that governors ask are now recorded.

Improvements to the curriculum were made in immediate response to weaknesses identified at the last visit in the breadth of the curriculum on offer to pupils. Music, withdrawn at the last visit, has been reintroduced and a permanent music teacher has been appointed. Pupils are now able to study French, in addition to German, taught by a teacher from the sponsor school. Pupils share facilities at the sponsor school for learning food studies where previously this was restricted to microwave cooking.

Safeguarding, seen as a strength at the last visit, continues to be effective. Plans are in place to make sure that catch-up training on 'Prevent', for the third of staff who have not yet had this, is delivered urgently. Procedures for reporting concerns regarding children who may be missing from education are followed appropriately and with sufficient urgency by school leaders.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching continue across the school. For example, in some subjects, teachers have low expectations for the presentation of work in books. Some pupils are not receiving enough support to help them to improve their handwriting although teachers regularly ask them to 'write clearer'. Pupils in mathematics and science were set work they could already do, which continued even when pupils told the teacher they had done this work. Where work was too easy, this led to pupils being bored and fidgeting.

While inconsistencies still exist across the school, there are early signs of impact on improving teaching in some areas. Effective teaching, leading to pupils making good progress with their learning, was seen in English, history, German, and art and design because teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan activities of the right level of difficulty which challenge all pupils in a class. Physical education continues to be a strong area and pupils were seen demonstrating good teamwork as teachers worked hard to spot weaknesses and support their pupils in developing their skills further. The way in which teachers question pupils is improving in most subjects and teachers now regularly ask pupils to explain their answers and to think carefully before answering.

A positive culture for learning is now evident. Improvements to the fabric of the building have been made which are having a marked and positive impact on the learning environment. Broken blinds in science have been replaced, and refurbishments and improvements have been made to some classrooms such as in drama and music. Pupils are now better able to read information on whiteboards because teachers have better-quality resources and new whiteboards have been installed in some classrooms.

Although a programme of support to further check on the accuracy of teachers' assessments at Key Stage 4 is now scheduled to take place this term, assessment at Key Stage 3 is still developing and teachers are not yet confident in applying new assessment criteria. Teachers do not have enough opportunity to see more consistently effective teaching through observing, and working with, teachers from the sponsor school and other schools. This is an area which senior leaders plan to develop in the near future.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

This area of the school's work, identified as a strength at the last visit, continues to improve further because of leaders' commitment and the financial investment in driving improvements in this area. The welcoming and highly positive culture in the school, with great warmth demonstrated by all pupils and staff, was experienced by inspectors from the moment they arrived. Pupils are delightful, exceptionally proud of their school and willingly share their views with inspectors. They greatly appreciate the improvements made by leaders and talked enthusiastically about the difference being made to their education.

Year 11 pupils in particular talked about how the school has improved and said they will be sad to leave in summer. They are massively proud of their new Year 11 study and social area, which they helped to decorate. Pupils were seen using these facilities with great maturity, sharing equipment and taking turns to play computer games. The head boy, deputy head boys and senior prefects understand their responsibilities to make sure the school is a safe environment and all pupils feel supported and well cared for around the school.

Pupils value the rewards available for good attendance, good work and conduct, and talk proudly of the merits, commendations, awards and badges they have been awarded in celebration assemblies. Exclusions continue to fall and internal exclusion is used well to reduce the number of pupils who would previously have been excluded. Very few pupils are now excluded who have special educational needs or disability because they are better supported in lessons and teachers take greater responsibility for managing the behaviour of all pupils. Attendance continues to improve further and is indicated to be broadly average, with all groups of pupils attending regularly.

Although pupils say they feel safe and have a good understanding of ways to keep themselves safe, such as when using social media or the internet, pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 have not yet been taught how to keep themselves safe from the threats posed by extremist views and radicalisation. An inspector witnessed inappropriate comments being made about future aspirations in written work in form time because pupils do not know enough about extremism. School leaders took immediate action to make a referral to the multi-agency safeguarding hub team when this was reported by the inspector as it went unreported by the teacher.

Further improvements are needed to careers education as pupils say they do not know enough about different careers or the skills they need to help them to be successful in future employment, particularly in Year 8. Pupils throughout the school still do not know enough about other faiths and cultures.

Outcomes for pupils

Achievement for pupils in Year 11 is indicated to be on track to improve slightly, compared with that of 2015. Although fewer than half of Year 11 are suggested to be making the progress they should in English and in mathematics, the proportions doing so are slightly higher than in 2015. School leaders are confident in the accuracy of teachers' predictions of future outcomes due to a more rigorous approach to quality assurance involving other schools, including the sponsor school. However, this moderation work has only been done for pupils in Key Stage 4 and further steps need to be taken to make sure teachers' assessments are also accurate at Key Stage 3.

New systems to track the progress of pupils in all subjects are used well by subject leaders and teachers to identify pupils who are making slower progress than they should. Teachers pinpoint gaps in learning, plan additional support that may be required to help them to catch up and make contact with parents to keep them informed of how their child is doing.

Only a third of pupils who need extra support to help them to improve their reading were seen by an inspector to attend a voluntary after-school support session provided for them; and typically only about half of the pupils regularly attend. Pupils told an inspector they do not like having to do this after school. There is no expectation to attend because pupils who miss a session are not required to catch up with work they have missed at another time. Additional scheduled sessions take place during the school day but these interventions are very new and no information is available yet to see if they are making any difference to improving reading for these pupils.

Teachers' expectations are not yet consistently high enough because the information they have on pupils is not used well in their planning. Pupils in mathematics and science are not given work which builds on what they already know, leading to pupils making less progress than they should. Teachers know which pupils speak English as an additional language, but are not knowledgeable enough about how to support and help these pupils. As a result, some pupils who speak English as an additional language make slow progress.

Effective action has been taken to provide pupils with plenty of opportunities to extend their writing in a range of subjects outside English. For example, well-developed responses were seen in religious education and in history.

External support

At the previous visit, the continuation of support from the sponsor, Lordswood Girls' School, was in doubt due to a lack of capacity from the sponsor. Discussions were taking place to move to a new sponsor. The change of sponsorship has not happened and further delays to this process are anticipated as due diligence checks are carried out. Following a review of financial arrangements and spending plans, the current sponsor is now in a position to continue to support the school, at least until the end of this academic year.

School leaders have actively sought support from different external partners to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments, and further work is planned to improve teaching. Most support continues to be provided through the sponsor, such as for checking the accuracy of coursework marking in English. Curriculum improvements are well supported by the sponsor such as through food studies, business studies and with the addition of French to add further breadth to the curriculum. Year 11 pupils are able to progress to sixth-form studies provided through the sponsor's mixed-gender sixth-form centre. The school also benefits from a range of other support, such as for human resources and financial services. This valuable and effective support should continue as this work is having a positive impact on improving the quality of education in the school.