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Mrs Annemari Ottridge
Headteacher
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Stevenage
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Dear Mrs Ottridge

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lonsdale School

Following my visit to your school on 29–30 September 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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:

The school is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection. This appointment may be made to any area of the school but the responsibility for the new teacher's induction and support must remain with a member of the senior team.

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 Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and raise pupils' achievements by ensuring that:
 - subject leaders and teachers have accurate information on the progress of pupil groups and use this to adjust their planning for pupils' learning and in reviewing the success of how different aspects of subjects are taught
 - staff, particularly in Key Stage 3, have the skills and subject knowledge to teach science to the same level as in other subjects, such as English and mathematics.
- Ensure that the school meets all statutory safeguarding requirements by making sure that:
 - the leadership and management of safeguarding are rigorous
 - all statutory policies and procedures are in place, up to date and fully implemented
 - all the required training is in place for staff and the designated child protection officer at the required intervals
 - the governing body oversees all safeguarding procedures and policies, and so carries out its statutory duties in respect of these effectively.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - refining further the tracking and monitoring systems of pupils' progress so that all leaders and managers have a clear view of the progress made by the different groups of pupils in the school and adjust improvement planning to reflect this
 - ensuring all leaders and managers are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to safeguarding and child protection, and are held to account for these
 - developing a rigorous system for monitoring teaching, which involves subject leaders and other middle leaders.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 29–30 September 2015

Evidence

During this monitoring visit, I met with you and your senior team. I held a range of meetings with the senior leaders responsible for assessment and progress, the curriculum, pupils' well-being and behaviour and for post-16 provision. Over the two days, I spoke with a wide range of pupils during lessons and at lunch. I also met with a thoughtful and articulate Key Stage 3 student who was able to share his ideas about the changes to the school. Students showed me their work in a range of ways, including their English and mathematics work. This enabled me to look at the impact of teachers' feedback on students' progress.

I met three members of the governing body, examined the minutes of governing body meetings and of the action group meeting led by the local authority. I scrutinised some assessment information for a range of pupils and examples of how the school's 'New Horizons' assessment system is being used, as well as the most up-to-date information regarding behaviour and attendance.

Context

Lonsdale School shares a building with the residential provision. Many students attend the school as well as the residential provision. This inspection related to the education provision. However, there are a number of overarching aspects of safeguarding which cover both aspects. For example, the same senior leadership team have responsibility for the residential and the school provision, and some staff work in both. Some policies and safeguarding procedures, for example the recording of staff suitability to work at the school, cover both the school and the residential provision.

There have been a number of staff changes since the previous inspection. The new deputy headteacher took up her post at the start of the academic year. The previous acting deputy headteacher still spends some time in school and this is well spent in ensuring a smooth handover of information. Since the last inspection, five teaching staff have left the school. Seven teaching staff have been appointed and all took up their posts at the start of the academic year. The appointments include a new head of the primary phase, a Key Stage 3 form tutor with computing specialism and a specialist music teacher.

Outcomes for pupils

Teachers continue to accurately identify the learning needs of all pupils. However, as a result of remaining inconsistencies, not all students make expected or better progress. Leaders' analysis of assessment information shows that pupils in two classes at the end of Key Stage 3 fell short of their targets and, as a result, their

progress was behind that of their peers. Analysis of progress information about pupils in receipt of the pupil premium is weak. As a result, leaders and governors do not yet have enough information, and in sufficient depth, to know which of the interventions are having a positive impact on the outcomes of these pupils.

Scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work shows that some are being supported to make very rapid progress. For instance, one pupil's work demonstrated that he had progressed from using just simple words to using independently written longer sentences. On too many occasions, teachers miss the opportunity to challenge the most-able pupils by ensuring they have enough scope to extend their learning further or by stretching pupils' understanding of what they have just learned. These pupils are not progressing rapidly enough. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of them and pupils' aspirations for future learning are high. In these lessons, pupils feel challenged, apply themselves well and have very positive attitudes to learning.

Sixth form students are increasingly well prepared for life beyond school. The school's records of off-site activities, such as transition days to college, demonstrate the large majority of sixth form students are developing a range of personal and social skills well. Pupils talk confidently about what they will be doing for the next phase in their education and training. All leavers have accessed further education placements in a range of providers because their placements are carefully selected through discussion between the pupil, the provider, the school and parents. As a result, students remain in their selected placement and attend well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders know which aspects of pupils' learning remain weak because they have improved the systems staff use to assess pupils' learning. The information also highlights the areas where pupils are making improved or much improved progress from their starting points.

Teachers use the new system for setting pupils' learning tasks increasingly well. It is supporting them to plan the next steps in pupils' learning, and tailor these to the needs and aspirations of young people. Because this system is used to analyse pupils' progress in their academic achievement, as well as aspects of their personal and social development, it provides staff with valuable understanding of the teaching and care pupils need to be able to achieve their best.

Where learning is at its best, teachers question pupils effectively to probe, support and challenge them to fully participate in lessons and make every effort to succeed. For example, in a Key Stage 3 geography lesson, pupils excitedly assessed the work of their classmates. The teacher's good understanding of the complex needs of some pupils, together with the effective work of the teaching assistant to support pupils' learning, meant all pupils made good progress in developing their understanding of the differences between living in towns or the country. One pupil worked very hard to justify her responses successfully to her classmates.

In another effective lesson, the teacher and teaching assistant worked successfully together in order to challenge pupils' perception about mental health difficulties. These pupils managed this sometimes challenging topic with maturity and sensitivity. In both classes, pupils made rapid progress in improving their communication skills. Teachers were also able to quickly respond where gaps in pupils' learning were understood or where progress is not rapid enough. These teachers quickly adapt their plans to encourage pupils to participate fully in the learning activity and use a significant range of communication techniques to offer the best opportunity for pupils to access the learning.

Where teaching remains weaker, the feedback given to pupils does not support them to address misconceptions or develop their understanding. Teachers' comments focus too much on what pupils are doing rather than the intended gains in their learning. As a result, pupils are not helped well enough to understand what they need to do next to make progress in their learning.

Leaders have sought external support to ensure children's learning journals in the early years are used accurately to assess learning. The improved resources provided for children are supporting them better to engage and develop independent learning. While improving, the expectations for the youngest children have remained too low. Children's needs are often not fully understood when they start school and it takes time to assess these. As a result, the right equipment to support them to learn is not readily available. Leaders are investing in ensuring that the resources available are appropriate.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school's provision for pupils' personal development and welfare continues to be strong. Pupils behave well and engage in their work, even when teaching is poor. They are keen to talk about the school and their learning. For example, many confidently and politely approached inspectors to enquire about how well their school is doing and were keen to discuss the differences the improvements mean to them. The recent changes to lunchtime, in which pupils select their own lunch and take it to their tables independently, are appreciated. One pupil described how it is more like living in the real world, saying, 'It makes me feel like I go to a normal school.' This improving level of independence and expectation can also be seen in some, but not all, of the classrooms. In some classes, pupils are expected to use equipment as well as they can and are challenged to be independent because teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. In these lessons, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning through regular opportunities to review and think about their work. In other classes, pupils are given too much adult support to think through and complete their work, so they learn less and do not improve their skills of working independently. Where pupils are encouraged to become more independent in their learning, they are developing good resilience and confidence; consequently, they are less prone to giving up or turning to disruptive behaviour as a way to avoid learning in lessons.

Leaders have improved the accuracy of reporting and recording of incidents of poor behaviour. Staff have been trained to use the new approaches and are implementing the expected policy. Their confidence in the use of new approaches and the support they receive to improve this aspect of their work has ensured that pupils are well managed so that, when difficulties do occur, they are managed quickly and calmly. Staff are determined to bring about improvement and this improved practice is being used to help other schools address similar issues.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has continued to model and demand that her vision for excellence and high expectations of pupils is evident in the daily work of the school. All staff benefit from a well-designed programme of professional development and training which is supporting them to strengthen their practice. Staff say they continue to feel well supported to improve by their senior colleagues.

The new management structure ensures that all leaders and managers are well aware of the expectations of their roles and areas of responsibility. These have been shared with staff and, as a result, they are able to seek support and advice from the most appropriate members of the leadership team. Leaders remain ambitious for the outcomes of the school, and maintain a positive and infectious approach to change. They have launched the new ethos and mission statement for the school. This was written in consultation with a wide range of key stakeholders, including pupils and parents, and the rapidly changing culture is both seen and felt as visitors enter the school. Staff morale is high. There is an improved understanding of the expectations leaders have for the outcomes for pupils, together with a greater belief that success can be achieved. New staff are well engaged in the school and have a desire for the school to be successful.

While governance is improving, the governing body do not yet rigorously hold leaders to account for the outcomes of pupils. They are not able to challenge leaders effectively because they do not have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the school's assessment information.

The assistant headteachers are increasingly effective and instrumental in securing improvements in the school's work. They take more responsibility for evaluating the impact of staff development and training on the quality of learning in their areas.

Although the curriculum offered to students is improving, there is still a limitation on the subjects pupils can study because of the availability of specialist teachers. For example, although pupils are taking GCSEs in other subjects, they are studying for only entry-level qualifications in science. These are too easy for some of them and pupils say they lack challenge in this subject.

Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. Senior leaders have incorporated the most up-to-date government guidance into the safeguarding and behaviour policies. All new staff have received child protection training and have a

good understanding of the school's systems and processes to ensure the safety of pupils.

External support

The local authority continues to provide appropriate support and challenge to the school through regular monitoring meetings. So far, these meetings have been held separately for issues relating to the school and to the residential care provision. The local authority now plans to pull these meetings together to ensure an accurate overview and to reduce the doubling-up of key issues and the extra demands this makes of leaders. The local authority has taken timely action to address priorities relating to safeguarding and are confident that processes are now secure.