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Lisa Lyon  
Headteacher  
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TF4 3PP

Dear Mrs Lyon

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Mount Gilbert School**

Following my visit with Denah Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 March 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 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.

The school may 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 Telford & Wrekin Council.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2014**

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that students make the progress of which they are capable, by ensuring that all teachers:
  - assess students' ongoing progress and learning so that they know how well the students are doing
  - provide work that builds well on what students already know, is not too easy or too hard for them and which they find interesting
  - mark students' work and provide written and oral feedback to students about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work.
  
- Improve students' skills in English and mathematics by making sure that:
  - there are high expectations of what students can achieve, particularly in the progress they can make
  - subject and school leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and marking to bring about improvements in teachers' practice.
  
- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes by:
  - providing a better range of subjects and activities that meet students' needs and interests more effectively so that they attend more often and take better care over their work
  - ensuring that all staff have the skills to support students in their behaviour and are consistent in managing incidents of inappropriate behaviour
  - establishing clear consequences for behaviour that are effective in modifying poor behaviour and reducing fixed-term exclusions
  - strengthening the rewards system further, and its use by staff, so that students are more aware of the advantages of good behaviour
  - ensuring the new systems for addressing poor attendance have a positive impact on getting students into school and reducing absence.
  
- Improve leadership and management and governance so that they are effective in bringing about improvements at a rapid pace by ensuring that:
  - checks on the quality of teaching and progress are far more rigorous so that areas for development are identified and tackled quickly
  - the school's plan for improvement identifies the right priorities and sets clear, measurable targets and timelines for improvement
  - procedures for tracking the progress of students are comprehensive and are used to hold staff to account for students' progress where it is not good enough
  - subject leaders have a clear understanding of the progress of students

- and the strengths and areas for improvement in their subjects
- governors set school leaders clear targets for improvement and are rigorous in checking that these have been achieved
  - checks on the spending of pupil premium funding from the government, and the Year 7 'catch up' funding, are rigorous and that the way funds are used has a positive impact on students' learning.
- Establish more rigorous systems for checking how well students are achieving and how safe they are when they attend off-site courses.

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

## **Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 March 2016**

### **Evidence**

The inspectors observed the school's work at the Mount Gilbert site and at the Web Centre, where a small group of Year 11 pupils are taught. They met with senior leaders and other staff of the school, a group of pupils, the Chair and another member of the governing body, two representatives of the local authority and the local leader of education who is supporting the school. The inspectors looked at a range of documents, including samples of pupils' work and assessment information, as well as information about behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection in June 2015, one higher-level teaching assistant and a student support manager have left the school and have not been replaced. At the start of the autumn term, a teacher-in-charge of science, a teacher of literacy for Key Stage 3 and a part-time art teacher took up post. An internal appointment was made to the post of teacher-in-charge of English. All pupils were taught mainly on the Mount Gilbert site at the start of the autumn term, but since January a small group of Year 11 pupils have been taught away from the main site at the Web Centre.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

Leadership has continued to strengthen. Members of the senior team work closely together and provide clear direction and guidance for teachers and support staff. They have a positive, optimistic outlook and are striving for improvements in the school's provision that will lead to better outcomes for the pupils.

The headteacher and other leaders have a clear understanding of strengths in teaching and where further improvements are needed. They carry out a range of activities to check on teaching and its impact on pupils' progress, and identify where teachers require support to help them improve their practice. This has largely been successful and there are some growing strengths in teaching; but there are still weaknesses that remain to be tackled in order for all teaching to match the best. For example, support for the teaching of mathematics has led to some improvement, but this has not been sustained and the impact has yet to show in pupils' progress in this subject.

Leaders have recently implemented a different system for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress. They have made clear to teachers their expectations for the amount of progress pupils are expected to make, as a minimum. Teachers have quickly got to grips with what they have to do and how to use the outcomes to inform their teaching. The system shows that many pupils are making progress and some are moving forward quickly, but because the system is

still relatively new, the robustness and accuracy of the teachers' assessments have not been fully tested.

The school's plan for improvement is focused on the most important areas that need attention and contains some measurable success criteria. It is updated every term to reflect any changes to priorities, and the continuing need to tackle barriers to learning, such as poor attendance.

Teachers who have recently joined the school said that the process of induction was thorough, and included a specific focus on safeguarding. All staff have been briefed by the additional needs manager on the 'Prevent' duty and on other important safeguarding issues such as child sexual exploitation. The school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks includes confirmation that all members of staff have read the first section of *Keeping children safe in education*.

Governors keep a close eye on the progress that the school is making in dealing with areas of weakness and in boosting pupils' achievement. Minutes of meetings show that they question leaders carefully and thoroughly, for example, about the recently introduced system for assessment, in order to decide whether it will do the job that is needed.

During this inspection, it became clear that the school is not fully meeting the Department for Education's requirement to provide pupils with ten sessions of education each week. The headteacher and governors have clear plans to deal with this as quickly as possible.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teaching has continued to improve, overall, and this is leading to improvements in outcomes for pupils. However, leaders' accurate evaluations and evidence from this monitoring inspection confirm that there is still work to be done. For example, pupils are not making strong progress in mathematics, and some underachievement remains. Teachers have taken account of the findings of the last inspection and increased the focus on developing pupils' number skills. However, they have concentrated on enabling pupils to complete tasks successfully by teaching a rule or short cut, rather than helping pupils develop their mathematical thinking and their understanding of what they are doing and why.

Teachers are consistent in following the school's policy for marking and feedback to pupils. They identify 'closing the gap' tasks when they mark pupils' work; but these tasks are not consistently useful in moving learning on, especially in mathematics, because some do not focus precisely enough on what the pupil needs to do next.

Teaching assistants work alongside pupils in lessons and help them to remain focused on their work. However, they do not always play a prominent role in teaching the pupils and promoting their learning, and this means that

misconceptions can go uncorrected.

There is a purposeful atmosphere in lessons and staff use a wide range of techniques to keep pupils engaged and involved. They make sure that all pupils participate in discussions by asking specific questions of individuals. Pupils listen to each other and are usually respectful of one another's contributions. Relationships between teachers and support staff and pupils are positive and supportive. Staff are skilled, patient and good humoured in their dealings with pupils, and this is largely effective in defusing situations and helping pupils to calm down. Pupils who spoke to inspectors appreciated the time and attention that teachers give them.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Improvements noted at previous monitoring inspections in pupils' behaviour and attendance have continued. The school is usually calm and orderly, and any instances of inappropriate behaviour rarely escalate, but are dealt with calmly and quickly by staff. Pupils usually remain in their lessons and should they come out, staff cajole and encourage them to go back in. Improvements in behaviour are leading to better learning in lessons. There are some pupils who clearly enjoy their lessons and want to learn.

Pupils said that there are some pupils whose behaviour is not as good as it should be, but they were not worried by this. They did not feel unsafe at school, and said that there is always someone who will listen if there are any worries or concerns.

The school's records show that attendance has continued to rise, but not substantially. There is a wide variation in attendance across the school, but it is better in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. A small number of pupils have attended every day so far this term, and there are other pupils whose attendance has improved markedly as a result of the school's interventions. On the other hand, there are some older pupils whose attendance has been and remains a cause for concern, and which is having a negative impact on their achievement. The school has done a good deal to try to support these pupils in re-engaging with school, including by teaching them separately with someone they know and trust, with some success. However, their poor attendance together with the fact that there are a small number of pupils who have not attended school at all, means that the school is still some way off its target for attendance. Staff check on absent pupils every day, including those who have never attended but remain on the school's roll.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Teachers' assessments of what pupils were expected to achieve at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 proved inaccurate. About a third of the 11 pupils who completed Year 11 in the summer of 2015 were expected to achieve five or more GCSE passes including in English and mathematics. Only one pupil did so and only one made the progress expected nationally in English, based on his Key Stage 2 starting point. No

pupils made the expected progress in mathematics. Leaders took action to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments and, as part of this process, now moderate pupils' work every half-term. Teachers' assessments are further checked externally through leaders from a nearby school.

Using the newly introduced assessment system, teachers measure pupils' progress against success statements linked to the schemes of work in each subject. Current assessments and the work in pupils' books indicate that pupils are now making much better progress in all subjects apart from mathematics, where progress continues to be slow. Only about half of the pupils are making the progress the school expects in mathematics.

Teachers assess pupils' attainment when they arrive in the school, which helps them determine pupils' starting points and to set their targets. Sometimes, targets are moved downwards if the teachers' assessments are not confirmed when pupils take standardised tests. Steps are taken to identify the knowledge, skills or understanding that pupils lack and teachers provide support to help pupils fill these gaps. However, in mathematics several pupils continue to underachieve because the support is not enabling them to catch up quickly.

Outcomes in mathematics are not improving rapidly because pupils both in the main school and at the Web Centre are not being taught well enough to accelerate their progress to make up for weaknesses in teaching in the past. For example, pupils' books show that they are often asked to complete long exercises which lack variety in the different types of number they are required to use, such as negative and decimal values as well as positive numbers. Sometimes, pupils are taught to rely too much on using a rule, for example, 'divide by the bottom and times by the top' to work out fractions of quantities, without having any understanding as to why they are doing this. Although pupils are asked to explain their thinking during lessons, they are not routinely asked to write down how they have arrived at an answer or to explain their solutions.

Weaker readers are supported through a reading programme that includes an emphasis on phonics and this is helping them to improve their reading. Some pupils have made noticeable gains in their reading ages and the gaps with their chronological ages are narrowing.

### **External support**

The school continues to receive support from a local leader of education and from an attached adviser, who work with leaders to help with improvement and to check on teaching and learning. This support has been instrumental in helping Mount Gilbert to continue to move forwards. The local authority knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well and makes sure to check on the impact of initiatives through regular meetings of the 'Raising Achievement Plan' monitoring group.

The next inspection that the school has will be a full section 5 inspection. The local authority and school leaders need to work closely together to deal quickly with the remaining weaknesses in teaching and to continue to boost pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics.