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Mr Steven Carter
Executive Head of School
The Telford Langley School
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Dear Mr Carter

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Telford Langley School

Following my visit with Gwendoline Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 April 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2015. 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 seek to appoint newly qualified teachers. This is subject to consultation with the school's monitoring inspector.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the chair of the education advisory board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Telford and Wrekin. This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2015:

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in English and mathematics, so that the progress and attainment of all groups of students improves rapidly by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about students' progress from assessments and the regular marking of students' work to plan lessons at the right level of difficulty for different groups of students
 - making sure that teachers' planning is clear about the learning expected in each lesson, so that teachers can check students are making progress in their learning and adapt or provide support during the lesson
 - consistently and effectively challenging low level disruption so that the focus remains on learning in all lessons
 - ensuring that teachers receive good training and support to develop effective questioning skills, so that questions probe and develop a greater depth and understanding in students' responses
 - making sure that teachers' marking leads to improvement in students' work
 - insisting that teachers' seize every opportunity when planning lessons to develop students' skills and confidence in reading and writing, and numeracy
 - insisting on high standards of written work and presentation in books.

- Close the attainment and progress gaps between disadvantaged students and other students nationally by:
 - analysing information about the achievement of students across all years to ensure that well planned interventions are put in place.

- Improve the attendance of all groups of students to at least the national average by:
 - implementing robust systems to track and monitor students' attendance, so that interventions can be put in place quickly to reduce the proportion of students not attending the academy each day.

- Strengthen leadership and management across the academy so that all actions drive improvement in students' achievement by:
 - evaluating rigorously the quality of teaching throughout the academy, using information about students' progress as well as observations and scrutinies of students work
 - providing relevant support and training for middle leaders
 - urgently reviewing the curriculum to ensure that students have access to a range of appropriate courses, and review the allocation of time given to

- lessons to improve the pace at which students learn
 - analysing more thoroughly information gathered by the academy regarding exclusions and behaviour and use this to target action in a more focused way
 - implementing robust strategies across the whole academy to improve literacy and numeracy, so that every opportunity is seized to support students in the development of these basic skills.
- External reviews of governance and of the academy’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 third monitoring inspection on 12 to 13 April 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, as the executive head of school, members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. I also met with the chief executive officer of the Community Academies Trust, which is the school sponsor.

Inspectors spoke to pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes and in classrooms, and met formally with groups of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised school documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the quality of teaching, and records of pupils' progress and attainment. Thirty-eight responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire were also considered.

Context

Since my previous visit, a director of learning in English has joined the school, taking up post in January. The school has vacancies for four full-time members of staff in modern foreign languages, humanities and science. Three teachers have been appointed as 'lead practitioners'. In addition, a personal, health and social education coordinator and corrective reading coordinator have been appointed from within the school. One member of teaching staff has left.

Three new members have joined the education advisory board, which is the governing body of the school, one of whom has been appointed as chair of the board.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders have taken important actions to strengthen the quality and accuracy of assessment information. The systematic checking procedures that have operated within the school have been quality assured by using the expertise from other schools within the trust. The new director of learning in English has acted swiftly to tackle the questionable examination forecasts offered in this subject area at the time of my previous visit. Consequently, leaders and the education advisory board have increased confidence in the performance information they have for pupils in the school, particularly for those pupils in key stage 4.

The school's records show that the achievement of pupils currently in Year 11 is expected to be an improvement on the extremely low performance of previous years. Broad measures of attainment show that a higher proportion of pupils are expected to secure C grade passes in English and mathematics. Likewise, attainment across a range of other subjects is projected to rise, with relative strengths emerging in computing, design, music, German, catering and some vocational subjects.

The school's analysis of pupils' progress also shows positive signs of improvement across a number of subjects. The progress pupils are expected to have made in English and mathematics on leaving the school is forecast to rise. This is a direct result of improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. There is, for example, clear evidence that strengthened teaching and assessment in mathematics has quickened pupils' progress since the beginning of the academic year. However, although pupils' progress is accelerating in these subjects, it is unlikely that the progress they will have made on leaving the school will match that of other pupils nationally from similar starting points. This is because, in the past, pupils were allowed to underachieve for too long.

Against some broad patterns of improvement, some gaps between the achievement of different groups of pupils are widening. This is particularly evident in the differences between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates in Year 11. Leaders have identified that these concerns relate to a relatively small cohort of pupils within this group who are now receiving intensive support to boost their progress. Progress, though better than in the past, is too slow for the most-able pupils and for pupils with special educational needs and disability. This is because teaching over time failed to provide the right levels of challenge or support for these pupils.

The achievement of pupils in science, French and Spanish remains stubbornly low. Teaching in these subjects is not strong enough to promote the gains in pupils' learning at the urgent pace needed. As a result, outcomes in these subjects continue to be inadequate. Although leaders are acting to tackle these weaknesses, this is a considerable concern.

Leaders are acutely aware of the gaps in older pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. There is a strong determination shared by staff to do as much as possible to mitigate this. A wide range of remedial actions have been implemented to help pupils to catch up. For example, an extensive programme of after-school study sessions is operated. Pupils testify to their high rates of participation in these. Pupils spoken to during the inspection explained how they find these sessions useful because their teachers direct them to the sessions that cover the topics that will help them to overcome their weaker areas of learning.

The critical need to improve the literacy skills of pupils is now afforded suitably high priority, although still in its early stages. A well-considered corrective reading programme has been implemented to help those pupils who struggle in their reading in key stage 3. This is delivered by trained staff. In a relatively short space of time, this programme has had a considerable impact on the reading ages of some pupils. In addition, leaders have launched a whole-school initiative that is providing pupils at key stage 3 with daily opportunities to rehearse their reading skills. It is too early to gauge the impact of this. Nevertheless, leaders now have a strong commitment to developing a culture in which reading is celebrated. Although leaders have made

plans to put in place a programme to support pupils with poor numeracy skills, these plans have yet to be actioned.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching at the school has improved since my previous visit. The actions that leaders have taken through the delivery of training, and providing support for teachers, are reducing inconsistencies and raising standards. Pupils also told inspectors that they thought their lessons had improved, describing how teachers are more 'professional' than they were in the past and how teachers now 'understand how students learn'. However, there is still some variability and some areas of sustained weakness. Pupils also confirmed this.

Where learning is at its best, teachers use their subject expertise, understanding of pupils' abilities, and what pupils already know or can do, to plan lessons that enthuse pupils and challenge them to do well. Questioning is used effectively to check how well pupils are learning, and make sure that the right level of support is offered. For example, in a Year 9 physical education lesson, pupils developed their skills in sprinting quickly because the teacher used his assessment of pupils' learning to give clear guidance to pupils on how their techniques could improve. In a Year 10 mathematics lessons, the teacher carefully checked on how well pupils were learning and moved pupils on to more demanding tasks when they were ready so that their progress was sustained.

Teachers are increasingly well focused on using assessment to establish the prior skills and understanding of pupils in order to work out where to pitch teaching so that it builds on pupils' existing understanding. These practices are particularly embedded in mathematics and adopted with growing success across other subjects. Expectations of pupils' learning are generally higher. In addition, teachers are now applying the school's feedback policy to greater effect. As a result, pupils are increasingly aware of, and able to articulate the progress they are making and their next steps in learning.

Where teaching has a weaker impact, the opposite applies. A lack of systematic checks on pupils' learning results in progress being slowed. Some pupils struggle without getting the help they need quickly or because teachers have not considered what support they might need when planning their work. Some teachers do not make clear enough their expectations of what pupils need to do to achieve well, and can offer criteria for success that are not understood by pupils.

Despite a clear focus on promoting pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum, the standards of pupils' written work are highly variable. In some cases this is because teachers do not establish what good writing looks like, so that pupils do not know what is expected of them; in others this is because some teachers continue to accept badly presented work that is rife with spelling and grammatical errors.

Inspectors continue to find a discernible difference between the quality of boys' and girls' presentation, with poor presentation from boys too often compounded by weaknesses in handwriting and letter formation.

In some subjects, including science and some areas of modern foreign languages, a lack of permanent teachers has continued to have a negative impact on pupils' learning. Scrutiny of pupils' work over time and discussions with pupils confirm this. Leaders are acutely aware of these issues and are taking steps to put this right.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school's behaviour policy and the rigorous systems to manage pupils' behaviour introduced at the beginning of the academic year are being used well by staff and are having a successful impact. Good behaviour is increasingly becoming the norm. Inspectors saw how teachers used these systems effectively to reinforce high expectations. As a result, low-level disruption is reduced, and most pupils engage purposefully with activities and get on well with their work, sustaining their concentration on tasks.

Pupils describe the sharp contrast between the 'lack of order' that has severely impeded their progress in lessons in the past, and the focused atmosphere in which they now typically learn. Teachers also endorse these systems. Discussions with teachers revealed how they feel empowered to manage pupils' behaviour and that they were now able to use a wider range of teaching strategies because of pupils' improved behaviour and attitudes to learning.

At break and lunchtimes, pupils continue to behave well, benefiting from high levels of staff supervision. Movement between lessons is generally orderly and efficient, so that pupils arrive at lessons on time and are ready to learn. The reduction in fixed-term exclusions and the numbers of pupils sent to the 'consequences room' since my previous visit further demonstrates pupils' growing understanding of what constitutes acceptable behaviour and their compliance with the school's expectations.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection say they feel safe. They say that bullying is rare. The school's records confirm this and show that leaders take suitable action in response to any reported incidents. Pupils feel that the school is a supportive place where they can rely on help from their teachers should they have a concern. Pupils show an understanding of some of the important risks that may face them. They are given good information during their personal development days and assemblies, such as how to stay safe when online, the dangers of using social media, illegal substances, and road safety. However, pupils' understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism is variable. Although the personal development programme shows that coverage of these issues is planned for the future, too few pupils possess an awareness of these issues currently.

Attendance has risen in relation to previous years, but remains too low and well below that of other schools nationally. Too many pupils are regularly absent from school, particularly at key stage 4. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is worse than that of their peers. Leaders' work is bringing about improvements in the attendance of pupils in key stage 3, but leaders recognise the need for greater impact. Additional staffing resource has now been put into strengthening the school's capacity to tackle this considerable issue.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The school's improvement strategy, driven by the executive head of school and a capable leadership team and underpinned by the vision and systems of the Community Academies Trust, is bearing fruit. Improvements in pupils' behaviour, the quality of teaching and, as a result, pupils' learning and progress, provide evidence of the impact of this work. Pupils and staff testify to these improvements. Staff questionnaire returns show that staff who worked at the school at the time of the previous inspection are unanimous that the school is better than it was at the time of that inspection, and most say that it is considerably better. Staff express confidence in the leadership of the school.

Work to reshape the culture and ethos of the school by setting out clear expectations and implementing systems is now well established. As a result, leaders are now focused on driving improvements in the quality of teaching and reducing inconsistencies in standards across the school. Teachers undertake a range of training that focuses on the development of whole-school teaching priorities, and access bespoke training and support to help them in developing their skills. This training is valued. Systems to manage the performance of teachers are rigorous and secure high levels of accountability for improving teaching and ensuring that pupils make good progress. Close monitoring gives leaders a diagnostic view of the strengths of teaching across the school, including the needs of individual teachers, and what needs to be done to bring about further improvements. Leaders have recently appointed a team of 'lead practitioners' to offer a further resource to improve teaching.

Since my previous visit, directors of learning have been given additional time to carry out their duties. This has enabled them to conduct more routine checks on the work of their teams, and offer the support needed to accelerate the pace of change in teaching. Routine scrutiny of performance information enables these leaders to operate well-coordinated interventions to help pupils to achieve better. Regular meetings enable these leaders to share good practice and develop strategies for further improvement. These leaders articulate well the strengths and matters for improvement in their areas, and are able to demonstrate the impact of their work more clearly than at the time of my previous visit. However, this impact is uneven, and the pace of change in some subject areas too slow. A lack of permanent teachers in some areas is a barrier to improvement. There is now a strong focus on

developing the role and skills of middle leaders to secure greater capacity to bring about sustained, rapid improvements.

The welfare of pupils continues to be given a suitably high priority. A new safeguarding policy was adopted in December. This is a detailed and comprehensive document, providing clear guidance to staff to equip them with the knowledge and procedures needed to keep pupils safe. Leaders have ensured that the staff are conversant with it. Staff have now undertaken level one child protection training and training on the government's 'Prevent' duty. A coordinator for personal, health and social education has been appointed in order to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

Strong leadership of the curriculum and of assessment continues to drive forward changes in these areas, with plans in place to develop the curriculum in order that it further meets the needs and aspirations of pupils. This work has included the implementation of a new assessment system at key stage 3 that is helping teachers to focus more clearly on the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding across pupils' time at the school.

Leaders have now actioned their 'pupil premium' plan and are in the early phases of monitoring its impact. There are emerging signs of some improvement, but there is a long way to go if leaders are to succeed in tackling the considerable weaknesses in the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

The education advisory board receives increasingly detailed and comprehensive reports from leaders. These reports are enabled by the wealth of the information that leaders gather from systems to check on the work of the school. This information ensures that leaders and the education advisory board have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school's performance and what needs to be done next. The board use their expertise to challenge leaders in order to hold them to account for the rate at which they bring about improvements. They also support leaders in meeting their strategic aims. New members who have joined the board have further added to the board's set of skills

External support

The Community Academies Trust has played a crucial role in establishing the vision, core systems, structures and operating procedures of the school since September. Leaders have adopted these systems effectively, and they have been instrumental in helping leaders to bring about improvements. Ongoing support, enabled by the sharing of expertise from across the schools within the trust, is helping leaders to learn from, and share, good practice.

A recently conducted peer review of the school's work has validated leaders' self-evaluation, providing an accurate appraisal of the school's work.