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Ms Jackie Cooper
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Cooper

Special measures monitoring inspection of William Allitt School

Following my visit with Ofsted inspectors Andrew Fulbrook, Laurence Riley and Clive Worrall, and Ian McNeilly, Senior Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 26–27 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 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 April 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 Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, in order to accelerate progress and raise standards across the school, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what all students, and particularly the most able, can achieve
 - teachers check regularly on students' progress and adapt their teaching as necessary to ensure that all students are challenged appropriately by the work they are set
 - marking and feedback are consistently helpful in moving students up to the next level of attainment
 - teachers check that students have acted on the guidance they are given through marking
 - all low-level disruptive behaviour is eliminated from lessons
 - teachers across all subjects develop students' literacy skills by regularly correcting any spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes.

- Improve achievement in English and mathematics, particularly that of boys, students supported by the pupil premium and the most-able students, by:
 - providing more challenging work in all subjects for the most-able students
 - identifying early any students whose reading is weak and providing more frequent and effective support so that they can catch up with their peers
 - checking students' progress in writing more frequently, and providing more opportunities for students to develop their skills by writing at length in other subjects
 - giving greater attention in mathematics to the development of students' key skills in calculation and problem-solving
 - ensuring that disabled students and those who have special educational needs, who are not covered by the enhanced provision offered by the school, make the same good progress as those who are.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - making leaders', including subject leaders', evaluations of the school's and their own effectiveness more rigorous
 - reviewing the use of early entry for GCSE
 - providing better support for students whose main language is not English
 - raising expectations by making all students' targets more challenging throughout the school
 - ensuring that subject leaders' plans give greater emphasis to improving the progress made by different groups of students
 - ensuring that leaders check more frequently on the impact of the measures being taken to bring about improvement.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 26 to 27 April 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with: the headteacher, the deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers; the chair of the governing body, the vice-chair and the chair of the teaching, learning and assessment committee; subject leaders; a group of teachers; a representative of the local authority; a headteacher who provides school-to-school support; and groups of pupils from all year groups. Inspectors also held conversations with members of staff and pupils and observed the behaviour of pupils around the school.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection one assistant headteacher has left the school. As a result, some responsibilities have been reallocated within the senior leadership team.

The school has recently received an academy order from the Department for Education.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders responded decisively to the report of the last monitoring visit. They intensified their efforts to ensure that their high expectations are understood and met by all staff. Leaders' reinvigorated drive, along with their timely relaunch of the school's policies, has led to improvements in all aspects of the school. It is essential that leaders maintain and build on the ethos of ambition and aspiration they have nurtured so well, so that the rapid improvements since the last monitoring visit are sustained and rates of pupils' progress continue to improve.

Senior leaders have established a productive routine of regular learning walks. This enables them to closely monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Their visits to lessons are recorded well, concisely detailing the focus of their attention, the strengths seen and any concerns raised. They give specific feedback to teachers and follow this up swiftly, reflecting their high expectations for rapid improvements, and ensure that teachers receive further support if needed.

Senior leaders ensure their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is accurate by carrying out joint observations with each other. They also work more regularly with external advisers to moderate their judgements.

Senior leaders use information gathered through their monitoring to identify patterns of weaker practice so that appropriate training is organised for all teachers or within departments. Teachers value the training that is geared very specifically towards areas needing improvement, such as quality of questioning and challenge. They describe a 'buzz' of enthusiasm to improve their teaching further so that pupils reach their full potential. Leaders recognise a tangible verve that has permeated through training sessions in recent months. Teachers appreciate sharing good practice and ideas with colleagues. This is reflected in their well-attended meetings on Friday afternoons when teachers meet and discuss ways in which they can move the quality of their teaching from consistently good to outstanding.

Since the last monitoring visit, senior leaders have produced a very helpful booklet, 'The William Allitt Way'. This enables teachers to be clear on what leaders expect of them and on ways in which they will be supported to improve their teaching. The booklet presents concisely the school's strategies for teaching, learning and assessment including key policies such as those on marking and feedback. It also reinforces leaders' high expectations, detailing the 'non-negotiables' – aspects of good teaching, such as challenge, that they expect to see in every lesson. There is also helpful information about the established training programme.

Senior leaders carry out a thorough and careful analysis of achievement information after each assessment point in order to identify patterns of pupils' progress and underachievement. They ensure that an extensive range of interventions and support is put in place swiftly. Senior leaders regularly monitor the impact of different types of support. This means that pupils are given the support in the subjects and aspects of their learning where they most need it. One-to-one work with learning mentors helps pupils to catch up and make progress. Senior leaders also identify when pupils' targets need to be more challenging and hold subject leaders to account if too few pupils are achieving higher grades. This thorough approach means that more pupils are making expected progress.

Subject leaders are continuing to develop their leadership skills and experience because they are well supported by their senior line managers. They have regular and helpful communication with senior leaders to boost the accuracy of their monitoring and assessments. They agree actions to follow up concerns and to address areas for improvement needed in their subject areas. This has led to rapid improvements, for example in the increased use of target language in modern foreign languages and greater consistency in the use of marking and feedback across the school. Senior leaders model the level of scrutiny of achievement information that they expect of their subject leaders.

The coaching and training they provide mean that subject leaders are increasingly well placed to monitor how effectively individual teachers use this information when they plan lessons.

Lead practitioners in English and science have established their roles and make an important contribution to whole-school improvements, by delivering training and support to colleagues.

The governing body is highly committed to do all they can to contribute to the school's improvement. They have devoted much time to supporting the school through the staff restructuring. However, they have not lost sight of their wider roles and responsibilities and are clear, for example, on the need to regularly review and adapt the allocation of pupil premium to ensure it is used to best effect. They are supportive of the recent proposal for the school to become an academy. They continue to draw on their professional backgrounds appropriately to provide insightful guidance and challenge to senior leaders.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers' raised expectations for what pupils can achieve are reflected in the use of challenging learning objectives. Teachers routinely incorporate challenge for all pupils into their lessons, as expected in the school's 'non-negotiables'. Pupils respond very positively to this and are, as ever, keen to stretch themselves and take on challenge. One pupil reflected the attitude of many when he stated, 'I like to push myself' when he chose the most complex task from a selection of activities provided by his teacher. However, there remain instances when pupils are ready to attempt more challenging tasks sooner, or need support sooner when they are stuck. This occasionally leads to off-task conversations and distraction while pupils wait for help or for more work to do.

The quality of marking and feedback across all subjects has improved because there is greater consistency in teachers' use of the school policy. When teachers provide high-quality written or verbal feedback to pupils, this enables pupils to improve their work by, for example, reflecting on their errors or improving the way they have worded a response by using more technical terminology. However, there remain a few examples where the policy is not followed, such as when pupils do not complete tasks suggested in their written feedback and do not have the chance to do so in lessons. Senior leaders are aware of this and are addressing individual cases effectively.

In the best lessons, pupils are seen to thrive on their positive relationships with their teachers.

Teachers know their pupils well so plan activities that inspire their interests and motivate them, for example by applying topics to everyday examples.

Teachers use questions skilfully, as seen for example in science and English. They target questions appropriately, checking pupils' understanding and maintaining their focus. Pupils comment on how helpful they find verbal feedback, for example in English, and can give examples of ways in which they have immediately improved their work as a result.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The frequency of low-level disruption has decreased since the last monitoring visit. This improvement is reflected in senior leaders' analysis of the recording of behaviour incidents, records kept of their learning walks and meetings with pupils. Inspectors saw very few examples of low-level disruption during this monitoring visit. Pupils generally demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning. They are attentive in lessons because the quality of teaching has improved and because they want to do well.

There does remain some inconsistency in the way in which some teachers use the behaviour policy. Pupils report that teachers use the behaviour policy in different ways, for example varying in their reasons for giving out behaviour and achievement points. However, pupils say that behaviour has improved since the introduction of the points system.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's achievement information shows an improving picture overall. Leaders' most recent analysis indicates that Year 11 are expected to make progress broadly in line with national figures in mathematics and above in English. Levels of accelerated progress are lower than average in mathematics and close to the national average in English. The school recognises in its self-evaluation that accelerating rates of progress for all pupils continues to be a priority for improvement, so that all make the progress of which they are capable.

There is an extensive range of interventions and support, including one-to-one work with learning mentors, to help pupils catch up and make better progress. As a result the gaps between specific groups of pupils, such as those with special education need and disability, and disadvantaged pupils, are narrowing in Year 11. There remains a mixed picture across different year groups as the impact of different interventions becomes established.

External support

Since the last monitoring visit, levels of external support from a range of sources have intensified and extended. This includes Department for Education funded school-to-school support. The frequency of visits from the local authority has increased. There are clear examples of support from all sources being effective in helping senior leaders address key areas for improvement.