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Mrs Jane Gotschel
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gotschel

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lordswood Boys' School

Following my visit with Bernice Astling, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10–11 May 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 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, school leaders may 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. 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 10 to 11 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the recently appointed headteacher and deputy headteacher, other leaders and the chair and other members of the governing body. An inspector met with a group of parents and took into consideration a letter to the inspection team written by a parent. Inspectors observed learning in 13 lessons taught by 11 teachers and made short visits to 'prep' to observe form time activities. An inspector visited the internal exclusion room to evaluate how learning is supported for pupils working in that area. A work scrutiny was carried out of Year 8 pupils' work in mathematics. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their work during lessons and asked them about their views of the school at break and lunchtime.

Context

Since the fourth monitoring inspection, the headteacher has left the school and the deputy headteacher has been appointed as headteacher with effect from April 2016. The vacant deputy headteacher post has been filled by one of the assistant headteachers. The number of pupils on roll has stabilised. Although fewer pupils are due to start in the school in September than Year 11 leavers, additional pupils have joined the school as in-year transfers from other schools. Plans to re-broker the school sponsorship continue, but this is unlikely to take effect before September 2017. In the interim, sponsorship continues under the existing arrangement through Lordswood Girls' School.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership of the school is now stable because temporary appointments have been replaced by new, permanent appointments to the senior leadership team. This important move and the stabilising school roll have helped to reassure parents, pupils and staff that the future for the school might be more secure. School leaders have personally written to, and met with, parents of pupils in local primary schools and this work has been instrumental in increasing the number of pupils set to start in the school in September.

Senior leaders demonstrate a continued drive to further improve the school. All areas of weakness identified at the last visit have been addressed through prompt and decisive action. During this visit, leaders were immediately responsive to recommendations to improve aspects of the school's work, taking on board feedback given and adapting plans accordingly.

Greater rigour has been brought to systems for monitoring teaching, learning and assessment since the last visit. The already successful 'rolling review' programme for lessons has been extended to include reviews of personal, social and health

education themes delivered during 'prep time'. Leaders now have a consistent approach to quality assurance which covers pupils' learning in all timetabled lessons. From this work, leaders have identified weaknesses in teachers' planning because some teachers are less familiar with the resources than others. Further reviews are scheduled to take place on a fortnightly cycle to check if improvements suggested are being acted upon by teachers.

Teachers are well supported in helping them to improve their practice through a range of sessions delivered by senior leaders, such as to ensure all teachers understand the importance of a consistent approach to careers education. Teachers are further supported in their professional development through opportunities to share their own practice and to learn from that of others through 'WOW Days', where they visit other schools in the area. Teachers now have the opportunity to work with a much wider range of external partners to improve their practice than they have done in the past. Any newly qualified teachers that the school chooses to appoint will be well supported through senior leaders in the school, including from the sponsor school, and will benefit from opportunities to see more effective practice through other schools in the area.

Curriculum improvements continue with the aim to ensure all pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum, appropriate to their needs. Leaders' careful management of the budget ensures all essential repairs are made to keep the building safe. However, insufficient funds are available to improve the learning environment. Science rooms still do not have access to water and gas for the pupils to carry out science experiments. This greatly restricts pupils' opportunity to experience a rich science curriculum which does not prepare pupils well enough for post-16 studies in science. The gymnasium is of very poor quality due to frequent water ingress and damage to the floor. This does little to support good physical development in indoor physical education or games. The monitoring and coordination of a strategy for careers education for all pupils from Year 7 through to Year 11 have recently been strengthened. Leaders use a questionnaire completed by pupils to plan to fill gaps in pupils' knowledge of employability skills and careers. These plans include a further review of the careers education strategy to ensure it delivers the intentions planned. Improvements have been made to the school's strategy to develop literacy and to improve reading. Pupils are now withdrawn from form time, rather than lessons, to avoid them falling behind with their subjects. Literacy leaders are reviewing the way in which improvements in reading are measured to ensure pupils catch up quickly.

Subject leaders have not been held to account well enough in the past and as a result some areas are not as well led as others which is slowing pupils' progress. More detailed plans for the curriculum are now in place in mathematics, but these are not sufficiently personalised so non-specialists in the department are unsure of the depth required in teaching particular concepts. This will be a priority for the newly appointed subject leader of mathematics when they join the school in September. In humanities, the subject leader requires further support to improve leadership and teaching which is now planned via a specialised leader of education from the sponsor school.

Governors say that improvements have been made to the way in which information is presented to them and the new format is helpful in identifying trends and comparing the progress of current pupils with historic progress. Governors know the school well and are well aware that further improvements need to be made to teaching in mathematics, humanities and music. School leaders engage well with parents and use a range of opportunities to gather the views of parents, including meetings of the Parents' Forum, and questionnaires following focused parents evenings such as for Year 9 options or careers information. Parents recognise the improvements that are taking place and talk very positively about the support their child receives in the school and also other support provided for their family.

Safeguarding is effective. Catch-up training on 'Prevent' has been delivered and all staff have now received this essential training and know how to report concerns over extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving and this is starting to have an impact on pupils making much better progress than they have done in the past. However, there are still pockets of weaker teaching and inconsistencies in some areas, namely mathematics, humanities and music.

In mathematics, pupils' work in books shows that sometimes there is unnecessary repetition of work at the same level of difficulty rather than pupils having the opportunity to develop mastery of a concept or opportunities for them to think more deeply about their mathematics. Too much work requires repetitive use of a rule or method that does little to improve their understanding or to accelerate their progress. Pupils do not have access to mathematical equipment to help improve their understanding. Pupils' understanding of the properties of three-dimensional solids was hampered due to a lack of models to help with their visualisation.

In humanities, pupils do not have access to a range of stimulating resources or materials and they are often required to listen to lengthy instructions rather than having the opportunity to get down to their work. As a result, pupils become bored quickly and disengage from their learning, leading to low-level disruption which is not always managed successfully through application of the school's behaviour management policy.

If pupils are withdrawn from lessons because of poor behaviour, the work that they are often given to do is different from, and easier than, that of their classmates which means they fall behind with their learning. Systems are not in place to make sure pupils receive the homework tasks they need to complete which could lead to them receiving further reprimands for non-completion of this work. Sometimes the work they are set is too difficult and they do not have access to their exercise books, or other text books, to support their learning. When this happens they resort to using their reading book to fill the time. Weak readers are then at a further disadvantage because they do not have someone to listen to them read and do not

receive the support they need to help them to improve their reading skills.

In a Year 10 religious education lesson, pupils enthusiastically took part in a discussion about the sanctity of life. They expressed their views with confidence and conducted themselves in a mature way, listening to, and showing respect for, others' views. Pupils' work in their books showed they are making excellent progress in this subject. All of this was as a result of highly effective teaching.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pastoral leaders continue to drive further improvements to personal development, behaviour and welfare. They know there are still pockets of low-level disruption in some subjects, and know these link directly with the quality of teaching in those classes.

Attendance is improving and is in line with the national average. Pupils eligible for support through pupil premium funding are supported effectively to improve their attendance and, as a result, there is little difference in the attendance of these pupils compared with others in the school. Exclusions continue to reduce as the use of internal exclusion is used as an alternative. Pupils are well supported to help them to improve their behaviour while they are working in this room, but further improvements are needed to help them to improve their learning and progress.

Bullying is rare and there are very few incidents of racism or use of homophobic language. When this does occur, it is dealt with quickly and effectively by senior leaders and there is little evidence of reoffending.

Pupils' behaviour and conduct around the school continue to be good. Boys treat each other, and visitors, with respect. They are well mannered, welcoming and helpful in holding doors open or providing directions to areas of the school. Pupils continue to demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning in most subjects and especially where teaching is effective because pupils are well motivated and want to do well. Pupils greatly appreciate the wide range of rewards they receive for attendance, commitment to their studies and academic success. Parents described how proud their children were to come home with new awards and say the boys work hard because they want to 'convert their award to the next level up'.

Pupils' personal development continues to improve because leaders actively plan opportunities to promote social, moral, spiritual and cultural awareness through form time activities, 'prep time', assembly themes and after-school clubs. The curriculum supports pupils' development and includes topics such as human rights, British law, cyber-bullying, teenage cancer, gang violence and eating disorders. During the inspection, pupils in Year 9 were investigating a business model for a community project, in which they demonstrated a good understanding of ways to improve their local area, while Year 11 were focused on techniques to improve revision.

The school works well with a range of external agencies and support families to make sure they receive the help they need for particularly troubled points in their lives. Counsellors work with pupils to support them with mental health and other issues; the school nurse makes regular visits; and school leaders support families in gaining access to health professionals, including child and adult mental health services.

Alternative provision is available for a small number of pupils through other providers. Although these pupils go on to achieve some qualifications, they do not make good progress. Plans are in place to improve this aspect in the future to make sure pupils make better progress and are able to take qualifications more appropriate to pupils' academic ability.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes are improving and pupils are making better progress across the curriculum. About 40% of Year 11 are indicated to be on track to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C which, although still below the floor standard for attainment, represents an improvement on historic information. About two thirds of pupils in mathematics and almost three quarters of pupils in English are now indicated to be making the progress they should, both of which represent marked improvements even though they remain below national averages.

However, progress in mathematics and in humanities is inadequate because it continues to be slow in some year groups. In Year 9, only about a third of pupils in mathematics are making the progress they should and only about two thirds of pupils are making expected progress in history and geography at key stage 3.

Gaps in progress for disadvantaged pupils compared with others remain wide in English and in humanities in Year 7 and Year 9 with disadvantaged pupils making less progress than their classmates.

Assessment information is used well to monitor the overall progress of pupils towards reaching their targets, and also to check on the progress made by groups of pupils and individuals. School leaders use this information exceptionally well to identify pupils who are underachieving and to plan suitable interventions to help them to catch up quickly. A coordinated approach to support disadvantaged pupils, and others, who are not making the progress they should is well organised by the raising achievement coordinators. This team identifies gaps in learning and works with teachers to ensure these pupils catch up quickly. The success of this work is seen by a reducing number of these pupils who are underachieving, although this is not yet the case across all subjects.

In music, pupils are indicated to be making exceptional progress but this does not match with school leaders' knowledge of the quality of teaching in this area. This mismatch indicates that assessment in this subject is inaccurate.

Weak readers are ably supported by teaching assistants, trained in reading strategies, and pupils in Years 7 and 8 work well together with mentors from Year 9 who listen to them read. Further improvements are needed so that peer mentors know how to help pupils to use a strategy to sound out words.

External support

Support provided by the sponsor continues to be effective and this is having a positive impact on improving teaching, learning and assessment, and leadership in the school. Further support is planned to improve leadership of humanities via the sponsor school. School leaders are no longer reliant on support from the sponsor as they have started to work with a wider range of other partners including Leading Edge schools in the area for staff to help them to improve their practice.