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Mr Jim Parker
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Dear Mr Parker

Special measures monitoring inspection of Manshead School

Following my visit with Duncan Cooper, Ofsted Inspector and Vanessa Love, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 25–26 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2015.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 director of education for the Diocese of St Albans, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2015.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the administration of background checks on staff is rapidly improved and that arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are regularly evaluated and reviewed
 - steps are taken rapidly to ensure that pupils, parents and staff have improved confidence in their safety on and around the school site
 - all subject leaders check the quality of teaching rigorously, providing challenge and support where it is not yet good
 - improvement planning is sharply focused and rigorously checked, with priorities that are understood by all staff
 - the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding are used more effectively to rapidly close the attainment gaps with peers in school and other pupils nationally
 - the school website and other forms of communication are compliant with statutory guidance and provide better information to parents, pupils and other stakeholders
 - pupils gain a better understanding of equality and diversity, and a wider appreciation of different cultures, faiths and beliefs in preparation for their life in modern Britain.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan lessons that are more challenging and that demonstrate higher expectations of what all pupils can achieve
 - implement and share consistent assessment and homework practices to inform their planning and give them a more accurate understanding of pupils' particular needs and abilities
 - learn from each other more systematically by collaborating and sharing the best common resources and approaches
 - demonstrate and model writing skills more explicitly in all subject areas.

- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by ensuring that:
 - parents and carers are supported to rapidly improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils as well as that of pupils with disability and those who have special educational needs
 - poor behaviour in lessons, particularly from younger pupils, is addressed through more consistently applied behaviour management strategies.

- Improve the effectiveness of 16–19 study programmes by ensuring that:
 - leaders act to improve the overall quality of teaching and achievement, ensuring that it is less variable and that the number of learners continuing their education from Year 12 into Year 13 improves
 - the development of employability skills and work experience is planned in a more targeted way to suit the needs and aspirations of individuals.

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 first monitoring inspection on 25 to 26 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, staff, the chair of the governing body, the governor responsible for safeguarding, and a representative from the local authority. Members of the inspection team also took a tour of the school site with the business manager.

Context

At the time of the monitoring visit, the school had appointed a number of senior and middle leaders. Some of these have been appointments created from resignations, and some are new posts linked to the priority areas identified in the last inspection. The headteacher has reorganised some positions within the senior team. He has also made a number of appointments to science, modern foreign languages and English, as well as to the senior leadership team, for posts that begin in September 2016.

The governing body's 'strategic board' is now meeting fortnightly to scrutinise the actions against the school development plan. The local authority is providing regular and effective support for this.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium was undertaken on 14 March 2016. An external review of the school's governing body was undertaken on 24 March 2016. There are action plans in place following these reviews.

The website has been completely redesigned and the information that it provides to the parents and community is of a much better quality, although there are aspects that need updating more regularly, such as the special educational needs report and the behaviour policy.

The inspection report was published on 11 January 2016.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders throughout the school have responded swiftly to the issues identified in November 2015 at the previous inspection.

The arrangements for safeguarding are fully in place and evaluated regularly. Previous administrative errors have been resolved; the single central register of staff recruitment checks is fully maintained and meets all requirements. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding is well trained and aware of the statutory responsibilities. He visits the school regularly to ensure that safeguarding procedures are in place and effective. The school site is better secured. Leaders are

taking all appropriate precautions to ensure that safety is being considered, monitored and constantly reviewed. This will continue to be a focus for all future visits.

The headteacher, supported by his senior team, has devised a school improvement plan which is closely linked to the areas identified at the previous inspection but that also prioritises the correct aspects to rapidly improve the school. Staff know these, and understand how they translate into actions in the classroom. For example, in lessons, the school has focused its efforts on establishing higher expectations of conduct and work quality. Monitoring systems are robust and are identifying not only where this is improving, but also where more work is still required. Consequently, the senior team are able to be more effective in where they pinpoint their support and intervention for pupils and staff. Leaders have used this information to identify underperformance and have successfully implemented support strategies to improve teaching.

Despite some staff turbulence since the last inspection, the staff spoken to during the visit feel well supported and are on-board with the changes brought about by leaders. The reorganisation of the senior team and new appointments at all levels within the school have resulted in additional capacity to improve areas of weakness identified in the previous inspection. Early review of the action plans and monitoring of these areas suggests that this is beginning to make a difference to pupils' achievement. One example would be in the school's work to address the gaps between disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs or disability and others. Intervention in key stage 4 is far more bespoke to the specific needs of pupils and these needs are now also much better identified. This means that gaps in achievement are now starting to reduce more effectively.

Governors have used the support given by the local authority, and the external review of governance, to improve what they do. The chairs of the varying committees are being better trained to hold the senior team to account. The more frequent and specific focus of the 'strategic board' has meant that leaders are being questioned more effectively over whether they are improving the achievement of pupils quickly enough. Governors are aware that more training is required, so that every governor is equally confident to challenge the achievement, attendance and behaviour information rigorously.

The headteacher and governors, supported by the local authority, have been actively seeking sponsorship for academy status. Despite their efforts, they have been unable to find a sponsor. In addition to this, the nature of the school's premises funding is making finding a sponsor more complex and challenging.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The work of staff to improve the climate for learning in lessons is undoubtedly where the most rapid improvements in the classroom can be seen. Adults around the school and in lessons are now using the school's behaviour systems more

consistently. In key stage 3, where the previous inspection identified the most concerns about pupil behaviour, leaders' focus on their 'non-negotiables' has meant that no poor behaviour was seen in lessons during the monitoring inspection.

Leaders are now using their monitoring systems to begin to evaluate the difference that teaching makes on meeting the needs and improving the outcomes for pupils. Leaders have rightly identified that there is further work to do here and have timely action plans in place to improve this. They have actively sought support from other successful local schools and the teaching school to find the expertise that they require to improve teaching in vital subject areas.

Staff have undertaken training and developed programmes in each subject area to demonstrate and model writing skills more explicitly. Pupils' presentation, handwriting, their completion of work, and the quantity and quality of work, are all improving. To move this forwards more rapidly, the school have employed an assistant headteacher with a specialism in English to lead on English and literacy from September 2016.

Homework systems in the school have been overhauled and pupils say that they are now being set homework regularly. The school is using two web-based systems, one of which is closely linked to the assessment system, so that staff can use homework to review pupils' learning and deal with any misconceptions more effectively. The school are reviewing the impact of these new systems to see how to make even more effective use of them.

Recruitment remains a challenge but leaders are definite that they will only appoint high-quality teachers. They do not shy away from re-advertising posts when they are not satisfied that applicants meet their requirements; sometimes advertising the same post three or four times until they recruit successfully. As a consequence of this, there is some cover teaching which pupils say is not consistent enough to help them learn effectively. However, recent appointments to vital positions in science and English mean that the school is in a better position for September 2016.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have fervently focused on pupil behaviour at key stage 3, as it was identified as an area for improvement in the previous inspection. As a result, pupils are behaving more appropriately and teachers are using the behaviour strategies more effectively to resolve any issues of poor behaviour. This is creating a much more purposeful environment for pupils to learn and many are beginning to make better progress.

The school site is better secured by the extensive fencing and staff are visible and proactive in their duties to monitor those areas where the school shares mutual access with other schools. Pupils know the site boundaries and say that almost all pupils adhere to these rules. They commented to inspectors that on the rare occasions when some pupils break the rules, staff deal with this quickly and firmly.

Pupils say that behaviour has improved since Christmas and that staff are fair and consistent in how they apply sanctions. Permanent and fixed-term exclusions have risen, however; this is in direct response to the staff's higher expectations on behaviour. Leaders are unequivocal that this increase was inevitable initially and that it is now beginning to reduce as the school's other strategies begin to make a difference to pupils' behaviour. Pupils and leaders have acknowledged and identified that more needs to be done to praise good behaviour, and there are actions in place for this.

Attendance is gradually improving and there is evidence that the school's strategies are having an impact on reducing persistent absence for some pupils. Leaders recognise that their monitoring systems do not always give them quick enough insight into some attendance issues and consequently this reduces the influence that they are having on improving this. This will be a focus for the next visit.

During the monitoring visit, pupils were polite and very willing to help inspectors around the site. Pupils are keen to talk about their school, about what they enjoy and where there are still areas to improve. They all say that they feel safe and that the changes to the school's premises make them feel safer. They say that bullying is very rare and not tolerated by staff. Pupils spoken to report that there is always someone to go to if they have a problem and that they are taught by the school about how to stay safe. Some pupils highlighted that, although they are given information in assemblies and lessons, they still feel that they would like more opportunity to develop their confidence to talk about issues relating to diversity and equality.

Outcomes for pupils

School leaders have taken suitable steps to ensure that assessments are accurate in core subject areas, using external expertise. This advice has also given them direction about how to run some effective intervention systems, especially for disadvantaged pupils. For example, the decision to implement intensive reading support for some pupils in key stage 4 is directly improving their ability to access examination questions. Consequently, current school information suggests that overall achievement in English, especially for disadvantaged pupils, is improving. Work seen in English lessons and books during the visit confirmed that there have been improvements in this area.

Leaders have identified that science has not improved enough and have acquired school-to-school support to fill gaps for current Year 11 pupils. They recognise that this is not a long-term solution and have recently appointed three new positions to support the science department from September 2016: an assistant headteacher, a new learning manager and an additional teacher. These will secure more teaching capacity.

Leaders have a comprehensive and ambitious action plan for the sixth form which is sharply focused on the specific needs of the learners in their care. Information,

advice and guidance for learners is becoming increasingly personalised through the school's induction programmes. Leaders are using this as a way to ensure better suitability and retention to courses, and ultimately improved outcomes. Leaders have rightly identified that the initial work that they have undertaken to make links with local businesses needs to be developed further in the coming months, and that the work-related opportunities still need to be more closely linked with learners' specific interests. This is an agreed focus for the next monitoring visit.

Leaders have meticulously confronted their inadequacies in assessment. They identified that their previous processes, especially at key stage 3, were not fit for purpose and they have reviewed and improved them. An assistant headteacher has developed an information system alongside middle leaders which has thoughtfully considered the next-stage expectations. Continued moderation and training is ongoing to ensure that staff are clear in how to use this. The school's evaluations suggest that this is still very new and there is still inconsistency in how well it is used by teachers in the classroom to plan effective learning for all pupils.

External support

The local authority is providing effective support for the school. The statement of action is now closely linked to the areas identified in the previous inspection report and provides accountabilities and timely support. This includes the support of the assistant director for school improvement and her team. The local authority is not only coaching and developing the governing body, but also brokering and commissioning very effective support to help the senior team. This is especially true in the commissioning of a school improvement partner.

The school has actively sought and welcomed support from other successful schools and the Chiltern Teaching School Alliance. This has been effective in quality assuring assessments and bringing in expertise, where required, to improve teaching.

The guidance from the local authority, the regular visits from the school improvement partner, the school-to-school work and the support from the teaching school means that leaders and governors are getting high-quality challenge from 'critical friends' on their actions against their school development plan.