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Mr Stuart Tonks
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tonks

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wilnecote High School

Following my visit with Richard Ellis, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 21–22 June 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 I am of the opinion that the school 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 Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2014.

- Improve teaching to at least good, particularly in English and mathematics, so that achievement improves significantly by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and reducing the amount that requires improvement through rigorous and accurate monitoring and prompt action that is evaluated carefully for impact
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations and are supported to use assessment information effectively to plan lessons that build rapidly on students' achievements from their starting points and provide increased challenge, particularly for middle ability students and disadvantaged students
 - sharing more effectively existing good practice to improve teachers' questioning so that students are challenged to develop their oral responses, using subject-related language where appropriate
 - improving the quality of marking so that there are higher expectations of both the quality and quantity of work set and students know exactly what to do to make progress.

- Improve the management of behaviour so that it is good in all lessons and at all times of the day around the academy by:
 - ensuring that all teachers deal with low level disruption in lessons effectively and promptly
 - increasing supervision at break and lunch times, particularly in those areas where students are at some distance from academy buildings.

- As a matter of urgency, improve safety around the building by:
 - carrying out an audit of repairs and safe storage needed, acting rapidly on this information.

- Take rapid action to improve the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders rapidly and rigorously address weaknesses in teaching and learning, taking all appropriate evidence into account, so that judgements made are accurate and lead to effective action
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders have a clear understanding of what constitutes good achievement and therefore an accurate view of the academy's performance in comparison to other schools nationally
 - improving leadership of English and mathematics, so that those responsible have a clearer view of what needs to be done to improve students' progress

and take an active role in raising achievement in their subjects

- evaluating the way in which pupil premium can be more effectively used so that it has a significantly greater impact on closing the gap between those students and others in the school
- ensuring that the governing body more rigorously holds academy leaders to account for the quality of teaching and achievement.

An external review of governance and 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 21 to 22 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, the vice-chair and another member of the governing body, and the chief executive officer of the Community Academies Trust. They observed parts of 23 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the head of science and the teacher who was second in charge of mathematics have left the school. No additional teachers have joined the school. A link with the Community Academies Trust (CAT) was brokered by the Department for Education and the regional schools commissioner. As a result, the school will become a sponsored academy of the trust from 1 September 2016. In line with this, and following consultation with the trust, significant restructuring of leadership teams and changes to policies and systems are planned to take effect from September 2016. Three senior leaders, two middle leaders and four teachers will be leaving the school at the end of August 2016. Two new middle leaders and two teachers have been recruited to take up posts from September 2016 and two teacher vacancies are still to be filled.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have continued to address the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection in September 2014. In particular, clear improvements have taken place in relation to the quality of teaching and learning and, as indicated in the school's own records, in the progress pupils are making.

The capacity of leaders to bring about required improvements to the school is growing. In particular, these include senior leaders who have been successful in gaining positions in the new leadership structure and middle leaders who have gained enhanced positions in it. They have noticeably developed their leadership skills and their strategic approaches to promoting the improvement of the school over time. However, current capacity is still too variable. For example, leadership of behaviour and related issues is currently much weaker than that of leadership of teaching and learning, and leadership in science is much weaker than leadership in English and mathematics. Leaders' own self-evaluation recognises this, and with the support of the trust, they are taking steps to address it; for example by restructuring leadership throughout the school and planning the introduction of revised policies and systems from September 2016.

A stronger system to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now in place. Evidence from this feeds directly into the professional development programme for teachers, which in turn is helping to raise the quality of teaching and learning. The management of teachers' performance is now more rigorous and ensures that staff are more effectively held to account for how well they carry out their particular roles and how well they contribute to improving pupils' outcomes.

The analysis of pupils' achievement and the interventions to support the raising of achievement have improved. Leaders in English and mathematics are now working more closely together to ensure that pupils' underperformance in these two subjects is picked up and addressed more promptly. There is now a better focus on the performance of individual groups at key stage 4, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs or disability, and pupils with different abilities and starting points. Although more emphasis is being given to the tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress in key stage 3, this is still an area that leaders need to develop. This includes the analysis of the performance of individual groups, so that in the longer term there is less emphasis on catch-up strategies in Year 11.

Assessment has improved and leaders are now more confident of the accuracy of assessment of pupils' progress and predictions about the standards Year 11 pupils will reach in their examinations.

Governors continue to support the school well and to hold leaders to account. They understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are positive about the next stage of its development. With school leaders, they ensure that safeguarding meets all statutory requirements.

As indicated above, appropriately detailed preparations are taking place for transition from a stand-alone converter academy to sponsored academy status with the CAT from 1 September 2016. In particular the trust has helped leaders at all levels, including the governing body, to raise their ambition about what they can achieve for their pupils. Staff exhibit a clear energy, excitement and confidence about the next stage of the school's improvement journey with the trust.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The school's own monitoring records indicate that, over time, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been improving. Observations during the inspection, some jointly with senior leaders, reflected the strengths and weaknesses identified in the school's own evidence.

Where teaching is strong, teachers demonstrate high expectations of both behaviour and learning and ensure pupils of different abilities are challenged well. However, the extent of challenge, particularly for the most able, is inconsistent. There is not enough evidence of teachers tailoring work and expectations to pupils of different abilities and in relation to what they already know and can do.

The school has been successful in improving the effectiveness of teachers' questioning. Where this is done well, teachers use questions to check pupils' knowledge and understanding and to challenge them to think hard. However, not all teachers are able to use questioning to probe whether pupils are developing a real depth of understanding. In addition, questioning is not often used to engage and challenge all pupils. As a result pupils who do not volunteer answers are not always expected to think and respond.

Teachers' marking and feedback are completed in line with the school's policy. Much feedback is valuable and enables pupils to improve their work and make progress in their learning. However, the quality of such feedback is inconsistent. Where it is weaker, this is reflected in slower progress evident in pupils' books and in their weaker knowledge of how to improve.

Where teaching is weaker, teachers do not always give pupils sufficient time to complete work, to review what they are learning and to develop it further. They sometimes confuse maintaining an effective pace in learning with getting through learning activities quickly.

Where teachers do not have high enough expectations of how pupils should behave, low-level disruption by a few pupils slows the learning of others.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Weaker leadership in this area of the school's provision has meant that the extent of improvements seen in teaching and learning and in expected academic outcomes for pupils is not reflected in the quality of behaviour or in rates of attendance and exclusions.

Pupils arrive and leave the school in an orderly manner and their behaviour outside of the classroom is mostly calm and respectful to each other and to adults. Pupils note that overall behaviour has improved and say they feel safe in the school. However, they say that there is still too much variability in how effectively teachers implement the school's behaviour management strategies.

In most lessons, pupils are engaged and enthusiastic learners. However, the behaviour of pupils in some lessons is not always well managed because not all teachers apply the school's policies consistently.

School leaders and leaders from the trust are aware of the weaknesses still apparent in relation to behaviour management and the leadership of behaviour and attendance. They are in the process of planning and providing training on new policies and of introducing new leadership in this area.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's records indicate that outcomes are improving, and this was reflected in the progress pupils were making in their learning observed during the inspection. Records indicate that the progress pupils are making in English and mathematics and the standards Year 11 pupils are expected to reach are either at or above the national average. Progress being made by individual groups, including disadvantaged pupils and those with different abilities and from different starting points, is also improving. Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others, both in the school and nationally, are still too wide but are narrowing.

The scale of improvements seen in English and mathematics for Year 11 pupils is not evident in science, which has suffered from severe leadership issues. Similarly the scale of improvement evident at key stage 4 is not evident at key stage 3, where tracking and interventions have not been as thorough.

Information about Year 11 pupils' destinations indicates that higher than average numbers continue in structured learning. This is the result of strong careers education for pupils from Year 7 to Year 11.

External support

New school-to-school support structures are being introduced as a result of the link with the CAT, and particularly with its lead secondary academy, The Polesworth School, which is a national teaching school. Training and development for leaders at all levels are currently being undertaken and appointments have been made to the new structure that will be introduced from September 2016. New policies and systems have been planned and will be in place from September 2016. Leaders, governors and staff are very positive about this link and about the changes that are due to take place. In addition to these changes, extensive external moderation and marking have taken place to improve the accuracy of assessment, particularly in English and mathematics.