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Mr Mike Wilson
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Dear Mr Wilson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wigston College

Following my visit with Lynn Cox, Ofsted Inspector, to your college on 23 and 24 November 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 college's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2015. 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 college is well placed to 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 Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in Years 10 and 11, so that it is at least good by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan lessons with sufficient challenge for different groups of students, particularly those with special educational needs, and those who are disadvantaged
 - ensure that expectations for behaviour are clear, codes of conduct are used and activities engage students in their learning
 - assess work accurately and use this information effectively to plan the next steps that students need to take in their learning
 - insist on high standards of presentation, that students take sufficient care over their work and regularly do their best
 - ensure that students act upon the feedback they receive so they develop their skills and understanding.

- Raise achievement across the college, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring all teachers have the highest expectation for what different groups of students are able to achieve
 - developing a more consistent approach across all subjects to improving students' literacy and numeracy skills
 - improving the rate of completion and retention for sixth form courses
 - improving the identification of the individual needs of disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs in order to ensure they receive more effective support, including from teaching assistants.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - fewer students fall behind and require extra tuition in order to catch up
 - strategies for use of extra government funding to support disadvantaged students are effective in that these pupils are helped to make at least good progress
 - governors are more active in monitoring the school, in checking that agreed actions have the intended impact and providing effective challenge and support for school leaders
 - the arrangements made to educate some students off site for all, or part of the week, are checked regularly to ensure students are safe.

- Improve the management of behaviour and safety by ensuring that:
 - all staff regularly insist on high standards of behaviour, especially for those who find it difficult to comply, by making effective use of the college's behaviour code in lessons and around the site
 - lateness to lessons is consistently and effectively challenged

- strategies to improve attendance focus on those with low attendance and that codes for recording absence are used accurately
- students accessing alternative provision are attending regularly.

An external review of governance and of the college's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 November 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the head of school, the executive headteacher, other leaders and the chair of governors, to discuss the college's progress towards the removal of special measures. Inspectors held formal meetings with groups of pupils, including separate meetings with pupils from less advantaged backgrounds, lower attaining pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and sixth form students. They spoke informally with different groups of pupils throughout the monitoring inspection, in lessons and at lunchtimes. Inspectors observed learning in 31 lessons, scrutinising pupils' work in the lessons they visited. They scrutinised records of pupils' behaviour and attendance and information about pupils' past and current academic achievement. They reviewed the college's child protection policy and related safeguarding documents. Inspectors also reviewed the college's website.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there have been major changes to the college's leadership arrangements. A new head of school and executive headteacher took up their posts at the start of the autumn term. Twenty-one teachers have left the college, including two deputy headteachers. Seven teachers new to the college have been in post since the start of term, including an assistant headteacher and other teachers from the trust. There is a new chair of governors. The college is currently registered as a 14 to 18 school. However, the youngest pupils on roll are in Year 11. From September 2017, the college will provide sixth form provision only.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the pace of improvement has accelerated dramatically and particularly since the start of September. Building on the work of their predecessors, the new head of school and executive headteacher have brought about rapid improvements in a short space of time. The quality of education provided by the college is better than at any time since it was placed in special measures. These two new leaders have skills which complement each other's strengths very well. The executive headteacher combines his strong vision for the college with sharp and incisive thinking while the head of school combines rigour and resilience with a warmth and strong presence around the college. The head of school is highly regarded by the pupils. Both of these leaders are leaving no stone unturned in their actions to improve the college. Neither is afraid to tackle poor teaching robustly. As a result of their leadership, and the improved work of other senior leaders, there has been a sea change in pupils' attitudes towards their college. While leaders recognise that the quality of teaching is not yet consistently

good, it is improving quickly. There is very little inadequate teaching.

Following this year's disappointing examination results, in which pupils achieved less well than the college's previous leaders predicted, significant changes to the college's leadership arrangements have been made, including the leadership of provision for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders recognise that, while good systems were in place to provide pastoral and motivational support for these pupils, these were not sufficient to raise their achievement in the face of the poor teaching over time that they had experienced. As a result, a new leader from the trust has been appointed to drive up the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, with a strong focus on ensuring that this group of pupils receive consistently good teaching. The curriculum and staffing arrangements have been reviewed to ensure that pupils eligible for the pupil premium and lower attaining pupils are not disadvantaged by poor-quality teaching. For example, some of these pupils have been placed in higher sets than their prior attainment warrants because leaders recognise that they have underachieved and are capable of much more.

Disadvantaged pupils are now prioritised in all aspects of the college's provision. For example, teachers are expected to direct their questioning to these pupils, give priority to supporting them in lessons and to mark their work first to ensure that the feedback they provide is of a consistently high quality. All staff know that their success in raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils will contribute significantly to the decisions made about pay increases this year through the college's strengthened performance management arrangements. Leaders acknowledge that the added rigour brought to this aspect of the college's work was not introduced quickly or effectively enough to bring about the improvements in attainment predicted in the run up to this year's public examinations.

The leadership of teaching has also been strengthened significantly. Now that college leaders have secured largely good behaviour from pupils, their analysis of teaching quality focuses much more sharply on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress rather than on pupils' compliance with their teachers' instructions. This increased precision has highlighted weaknesses in teaching which previously had not been identified. Therefore, leaders have a much deeper understanding of teachers' individual strengths and weaknesses than before. They know that some teachers previously judged to be teaching consistently well are not equally effective in all their lessons. This has led to leaders revising their assessment of teaching quality. Their assessments now reflect much more accurately the day-to-day teaching experienced by pupils. Where teachers need additional support, they receive time-limited coaching tailored to their individual needs with further observations of their teaching to ensure that weaknesses are being remedied. Staff know that leaders will tackle continued poor performance robustly. In fact, the pupils know this too. They told inspectors that their teachers are now being properly led and held to account for implementing the college's higher expectations.

The college's approach to assessment has been strengthened. The leaders'

predictions in advance of the 2016 examination results proved to be overly optimistic and, in a few subjects, woefully so. In a small minority of subjects, teachers' assessment of pupils' coursework proved to be inaccurate, resulting in inflated predictions and, ultimately, in the pupils' marks being downgraded by the awarding bodies. The teachers responsible have now left the college. They have been replaced by strong practitioners, including from within the trust.

More commonly, teachers' projections of what pupils could achieve in the time left between practice tests and the summer examinations were overly ambitious and, in a few subjects, pupils attained far less well than their teachers predicted. Leaders are rightly being much more circumspect than in the past in assessing the information they are given by teachers and subject leaders. They now routinely challenge staff to justify the projections they are making about pupils' likely examination results to ensure that they are both credible and achievable. Leaders recognise, however, that this added rigour is too new for them to be sure that their current predictions are accurate in all subjects. They know that in some subjects teachers' assessments of pupils' likely achievements remain inflated, particularly given the pupils' low starting points as a result of the previously weak teaching they have experienced.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inspectors agree with the college's leaders and the pupils that the quality of teaching is improving more quickly than at any time since the college was placed in special measures. Every one of the very many pupils who inspectors spoke with was complimentary about the quality of teaching they now receive. This included lower- and higher-attaining pupils, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. One pupil from a disadvantaged background reported, 'the teaching standard is better than anything we've ever had before' and his peers agreed. The pupils know why teaching is getting better. They point to the fact that, for the first time, they are taught by specialist teachers in all their subjects. While this should be a given, it has not always been the case. It helps to explain why pupils' attainment in some subjects, for example history, geography, psychology, sociology and some aspects of design technology remained low in the summer's examinations. Pupils also know that the weakest teachers have been replaced by much more effective staff. In discussions, some were able to describe how teaching is monitored more closely by senior staff and why this monitoring is having a positive impact.

Strong teaching is seen increasingly consistently across the college, including in subjects where teaching has previously been weak. For example, in product design pupils were observed working hard and effectively in response to the teacher's well-planned activities, drawn from her strong subject knowledge and supported by regular opportunities for pupils to review their progress. In an AS level sociology lesson, students demonstrated good knowledge and understanding as they tackled increasingly difficult examination questions. The quality of teaching in English is now

consistently strong. The quality of mathematics teaching has also improved significantly due to changes in staffing and good leadership by the subject leader. Leaders have ensured that some of the most effective teaching is directed at the lower sets. Previously, this has not been the case. This is contributing to the improved behaviour seen across the college and ensuring much more consistency and equity in pupils' experiences in lessons.

While in almost all of the lessons visited the pupils were working purposefully and productively, pupils were seen to learn best when lessons had the following characteristics:

- high expectations of what pupils should achieve with good use of time-limited activities to ensure that pupils worked at a good pace, seen, for example, in a low-attaining class in English
- learning pitched very closely to pupils' needs and well-informed by teachers' assessment of where gaps lie in pupils' knowledge and what they need to do to attain more highly, seen, for example, in mathematics and sociology
- strong use of ongoing assessment throughout the lesson to adapt teaching in response to pupils' emerging understanding, seen, for example, in AS level mathematics and Year 11 French
- high-quality written feedback which leads to demonstrable improvements in pupils' attainment, seen, for example, in geography
- plentiful opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding and confidence through reviewing their own and others' work through engaging activities, for example in electronics
- strong and regular use of examination criteria used to inform teachers' planning and pupils' learning, seen across a range of subjects.

A common feature of less effective teaching is teachers' over-reliance on protracted question and answer sessions to gauge pupils' understanding. While this was seen to work well in some of the smaller sixth form classes where everyone can be involved, in the larger classes, usually in Year 11, it often resulted in the pace of learning slowing and pupils switching off. While teachers increasingly check pupils' work for spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, the college's approach to promoting high standards of literacy and numeracy is still not well enough embedded across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' views about the standards of behaviour at the college are now almost universally positive. This was not the case in previous monitoring inspections where some pupils, particularly those in lower-attaining sets, reported that behaviour continued to be too variable, even though it was improving. Formal and informal discussions with pupils in the lower sets tallied with inspectors' findings that behaviour has improved right across the college. As with the quality of teaching, pupils' experiences are now much more equitable than before, regardless of their

prior attainment or individual needs. Incidents of low level disruption, though not completely eradicated, are much reduced. When asked to identify the biggest improvements to the college, pupils commonly pointed to the improved quality of teaching and pupils' increased motivation and attitudes to learning.

Leaders have also been successful in raising overall attendance so that it is now closely aligned to the national average. However, disadvantaged pupils continue to attend less regularly than other pupils. Improving the attendance of this group of learners is proving to be a difficult challenge. While some pupils are experiencing a complex range of difficulties which hinder their attendance, including physical and mental health problems, the gaps in attendance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers remain too wide. In addition, a small minority of Year 13 students do not attend college regularly enough. Strategies to increase punctuality to college and to lessons have proved to be effective though leaders and managers know they need to remain persistent to eradicate lateness completely.

All pupils spoken with reported that they feel safe in college, including those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. They report that there is barely any bullying as a result of the improved leadership and management of the college and pupils' improved conduct and attitudes. Pupils report that it is safe 'to be different' at Wigston College. They are also well informed about the risks associated with using social media. They have received teaching this year about cases of child sexual exploitation that have received local and national attention. This has helped build their confidence and understanding of how to stay safe, with additional support provided to groups of potentially vulnerable girls.

While pupils are respectful of people's differences and views, the college's strategies to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for others are not well developed.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders and governors know that last summer's examination results were not good enough and, in a few instances, fell well short of the college's predictions. Taken together, Year 11 pupils achieved in line with similar pupils nationally and performed relatively well against the government's new 'Progress 8' performance measure which assesses pupils' achievement in their best eight subjects. Higher proportions of the most able pupils secured the EBacc qualification than in other schools nationally. Progress was strong in English for pupils across the ability range with the most able pupils achieving exceptionally well. Conversely, not enough of the most able scientists secured the highest grades in the three separate sciences. While progress in mathematics was less strong than in English, pupils achieved in line with their peers nationally.

However, the results overall were affected not only by a legacy of poor teaching, including some subject teaching delivered by non-specialists, but by the continued

gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. While there were some gains in the attainment of this group of learners, including the proportion that achieved five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics, the gaps in achievement between them and other pupils remained too wide.

Despite some excellent individual successes, results in the sixth form were similarly disappointing. Not enough students met their targets in their full range of AS levels, A levels or vocational qualifications. Only in a few subjects was achievement markedly better than last year and in some subjects pupils achieved less well than their predecessors. College leaders know that, as well as poor levels of student retention and attendance and the prevalence of teaching by non-specialist staff in some subjects, not enough attention was given to middle attaining pupils to ensure that they met their targets. This group of students achieved the least well. Leaders acknowledge that their systems for monitoring students' progress were not rigorous enough and that they relied too heavily on overly optimistic predictions by staff.

In the face of last summer's results, which were lower than the previous leaders predicted, inspectors did not expect to see the huge improvements they observed during this monitoring visit. Pupils currently in the college are having a more secure and consistent experience as a result of the improved quality of teaching and better attitudes to learning. Observations of teaching and the scrutiny of pupils' work show that specialist teachers who have picked up underperforming groups are doing sterling work in helping pupils to catch up. Pupils recognise and appreciate this. Sixth form students are universally positive about the quality of teaching and the support they are now receiving. Students who are repeating GCSEs in English and mathematics are being taught by some of the best teachers in the college.

Disadvantaged pupils in particular are now doing much better than before. The college's decision to share with them their status as 'pupil premium' pupils has proved to be well judged and is resulting in high levels of motivation. The pupils are able to describe the range of targeted provision they receive, whether through being moved into higher sets, receiving additional teaching in and out of class or simply being provided with the text books they need to be able to study at home. They value the 'aspire room' of which they have exclusive use. Increasingly, they can describe precisely how the support they are receiving, including in lessons and through weekly mentoring, is making a difference to their attainment. Pupils put much of the improvements down to the new head of school. In discussions, one said, 'he takes our achievement personally'. The rest of the group agreed.

While these marked and swift improvements to most aspects of provision are resulting in pupils making much more rapid gains this term than before, it is too soon to assess the difference that the changes are making to pupils' achievement over a sustained period of time. This is why inspectors judge that it is too soon for the college to be removed from special measures.

External support

The new executive headteacher of the Wigston Academies Trust has quickly and deservedly won the confidence of trustees and governors. He has added clarity to the trust's vision for its two schools and brought an increased sense of urgency to the pace of improvement. The increased clarity in roles and responsibilities between trustees and the local governing body is enabling governors to monitor the work of the college more effectively than before, including through the new and experienced chair of governors. Similar clarity has been established between the role of the executive headteacher and the head of school and within the new senior leadership team.

The trust has made other good appointments, including of teachers from within the trust to teach in subjects where teaching previously has been weak. The leadership of provision for disadvantaged pupils has also been strengthened with the appointment of a strong leader from the other school in the trust to lead on this aspect of the college's work.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and students in Year 13.