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3 February 2017

Mark Jordan  
Executive Principal  
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Dear Mr Jordan

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Inspire Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 26 January 2017, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2016. 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 not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the advisory board, the chair of the trust, the regional schools' commissioner and the director of children's services for Medway. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2016.**

- Improve leadership and management at all levels so that essential improvements are made by:
  - implementing rigorous and effective systems for monitoring all aspects of the school's work
  - ensuring that self-evaluations are accurate
  - sharpening leaders' plans for improvement so that they are more focused on the key issues
  - developing middle leaders so that they can help to raise standards more quickly
  - ensuring that senior and middle leaders improve the quality of teaching and its impact on learning
  - securing high-quality external support for leaders as a matter of urgency
  - implementing improvements to the curriculum so that it fully meets the needs of all pupils, including learners in the sixth form
  - ensuring that procedures for managing teachers' performance are effective and staff are held to account for their impact on pupils' achievement.
- Significantly improve teaching to raise the achievement of all groups of pupils in all subjects, but particularly in English, by:
  - raising teachers' expectations for all pupils and groups of pupils so that work has the appropriate challenge and builds on what pupils already know and can do
  - tightening teachers' use of assessment so that work set in lessons is more closely linked to the needs of pupils with differing abilities
  - developing teachers' subject knowledge
  - ensuring that lessons more consistently capture the interest and enthusiasm of pupils.
- Improve pupils' behaviour through:
  - making better use of behaviour plans and how they link to the curriculum to reduce the number of exclusions
  - improving levels of attendance for all pupils.

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 second monitoring inspection on 26 January 2017**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, the head of school and the chair of the advisory board of the Parallel Learning Trust. Meetings were held with advisers, leaders, staff and a group of parents. Her Majesty's Inspector observed teaching and learning in lessons and visited two alternative providers who deliver vocational programmes. She also met with a representative from the Medway Business and Enterprise Partnership and a local authority officer. A visit was made to observe a drama therapy session and a sample of pupils' work was reviewed.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the vice principal has been appointed as head of school. An assistant principal and two teachers have left the school. An English teacher and science teacher were appointed in November 2016 and a new teaching assistant started in January 2017.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Leaders continue to monitor and review the school's work closely and have consolidated their systems for checking on teaching, evaluating pupils' progress and ensuring that pupils follow appropriate programmes. Leaders' evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in teaching is accurate, thoughtful and focused on the right priorities. Senior leaders are realistic about the scale of work to do to improve the school and are rightly determined to strengthen the changes that have been made and assure better performance in the long term.

Plans to improve the school have sensibly been adjusted to reflect recent improvements and are now much more about making sustainable improvements rather than just securing stability. However, plans to improve teaching, learning and assessment are focused more on what teachers will do and how hard they will work than the impact their work will make on progress. Actions to improve teaching and learning are not being judged sufficiently sharply by their impact on pupils' progress.

At senior level, leadership is stronger. All the senior leaders convey a confident and coherent vision of the purpose of the school. Advisers commissioned by the Parallel Learning Trust have provided strong support and guidance about the design of the curriculum and the system for tracking pupils' academic progress. Senior leaders' management of staff performance is much more stringent and, notwithstanding the challenge of recruitment, there is a real determination to make strong appointments to key roles. Staff have better opportunities to work together to share good practice and focus on pupils' needs, ability and progress. Leaders have successfully

introduced more consistent approaches to using information about pupils' ability and behavioural needs. While these approaches are beginning to pay off, leaders have accurately identified that there is more to do to achieve consistently stronger teaching and faster progress.

There is still a gap in the leadership of mathematics and English. At the moment, the school is relying on the oversight of senior leaders and advisory support to develop English and mathematics because there is currently no dedicated subject leadership. However, day-to-day teaching of English has been strengthened by appointing new staff and making good use of the expertise from a specialist consultant.

Members of the school's advisory board have learned from the section 5 inspection and the previous monitoring inspection and have stepped up the degree of challenge and rigour in their own monitoring of the school's work. They are wisely seeking to recruit new members to the board to reinforce their independence and objectivity.

The reputation of the school is improving among parents, carers and the local authority. Parents and carers told Her Majesty's Inspector that they can see the improvements to the school: communication is strong and the provision is planned carefully to meet the needs of all pupils, including those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. In addition, the local authority has identified that the school is a safer and more productive environment in which to place pupils with particular needs. Local authority officers are confident in the expertise growing in the school; relationships are positive and focused on the best interests of pupils.

At the time of the last monitoring inspection, it was noted that pupils did not have access to suitable outdoor areas for play or physical exercise because of the poor upkeep of the site surrounding the school. It is a shame that this dismal situation has not improved, although Her Majesty's Inspector is aware that the delayed refurbishment of the school site is anticipated imminently.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

There have been improvements to teaching, learning and assessment since the previous monitoring inspection. Better planning and higher expectations in English are beginning to make a positive impact on the standards of work in pupils' books and their interest in learning. However, there is still much to do to help pupils to catch up and overcome their barriers to reading, writing and communication. Pupils are reading more, but are reluctant writers and in some cases over-reliant on teaching assistants as scribes. While this may be an acceptable way of completing work in test conditions, for some pupils it places a ceiling on their achievement.

The new system for regularly assessing pupils' progress, setting targets and tracking how well they are doing has already made a real difference. At the previous

monitoring inspection, pupils and staff were talking more about learning than behaviour, but now pupils want to know what level they are at and what their target is. In all of the lessons observed by Her Majesty's Inspector, pupils asked about their targets and sought reassurance that they were on the right track.

Pupils still tend to be impulsive and lose concentration or let their frustrations get in the way of learning. However, better materials and teachers' confidence help to get them back on track. Teachers continue to develop and refine their use of information about pupils' needs in order to plan learning and are becoming increasingly confident in providing tasks that stretch and challenge all pupils. Pupils value the feedback they get from teachers and are beginning to act upon the advice they are given to improve their work.

Pupils who attend vocational or bespoke programmes with alternative providers clearly appreciate the opportunity to undertake practical skills and prepare for working life. Her Majesty's Inspector saw pupils relaxed and confident, learning teamwork and positive communication, in addition to woodcraft and survival skills as part of outdoor learning. Through challenging programmes chosen with care and support, these pupils can see more of a future for themselves and are proud of their achievements. Pupils clearly feel that they have a choice about their hopes and dreams, in some cases for the first time.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

As at the first monitoring inspection visit, the rates of serious behavioural incidents leading to exclusion or restrictive physical intervention have continued to decline overall.

However, it remains a concern that some pupils find it difficult to manage their language. Sometimes swearing and trading insults interrupt the otherwise calm atmosphere of the school. Staff certainly challenge bad language and unacceptable taunting, but have not yet succeeded in instilling sufficient self-control in some pupils.

Nevertheless, relationships between staff and pupils are generally warm and supportive. Pupils clearly build up trust in the adults in the school and gain more security. Staff are skilled at de-escalating serious conflicts when emotions run high. Increasingly, pupils show more resilience and staying power, particularly in lessons when expectations are consistent.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the range of therapies available to the pupils has increased. As part of their provision, pupils can benefit from dog mentoring, drama and art therapy. It is early days and leaders have not yet been able to analyse the impact of the therapeutic work, but there are clear signs that therapies are calming pupils and unlocking difficulties with communication.

Pupils' attendance is below that found nationally in other schools. The overall figures disguise some important successes for individual pupils whose attendance has markedly improved over time as a result of improved teaching and stability in the school. These pupils receive the right support for their needs, settle well into school and make progress. However, some pupils do not attend as well as they should.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Leaders have checked pupils' rates of progress in English, mathematics and their other curriculum subjects since the beginning of the autumn term 2016 and have noted that more pupils are on track with their learning. More pupils in all year groups have made progress this term and are further ahead than the equivalent groups last year. However, in mathematics, fewer pupils are meeting or exceeding their targets, which reflects recent changes in staffing and previous gaps in pupils' learning.

Achievement across the curriculum is not yet consistently strong. However, as teaching becomes more secure and expectations are raised, pupils are beginning to catch up and acquire the essential skills they need. Pupils are motivated by aiming for accredited qualifications and more confident about sitting formal examinations. It is encouraging that school leaders are often delighted with individual successes and completed pieces of work produced by pupils, notably in art and technology.

Many pupils have low reading ages and are reluctant to read. Nevertheless, pupils are gradually becoming more interested in books and have contributed to decisions about how the library should be restocked. Each class now spends time in the library choosing and reading books as part of their English programmes. In addition, carefully planned programmes of extra help are helping to raise pupils' reading age and confidence.

School leaders can demonstrate that pupils who attend bespoke programmes, work experience or vocational pathways are making progress in their courses. As a result of more careful planning for employability skills and work experience, pupils are becoming better prepared for their next steps and further education, training or careers. However, the school is not doing enough to check that pupils on off-site programmes are progressing well with their literacy and numeracy. The current system of tracking and evaluating progress is not yet tailored to pupils on alternative programmes although leaders have correctly identified that this is their next crucial step.

### **External support**

Expert guidance and support from an external adviser commissioned by the trust have enabled the school to move forward quickly with its assessment of pupils' progress.

The school continues to benefit from advice and guidance from a consultant who is supporting the school with developing a thematic curriculum. This has been particularly valuable during a period of change when there is no nominated leader for English.

Together with increased capacity and members on the advisory board, the school has sought additional support from a school improvement adviser and made close links with local good or outstanding schools. The school's improved reputation in the local authority has also brought more communication and less isolation.