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Mr Jon Hayes
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Dear Mr Hayes

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Queen Katherine School

Following my visit with David Hampson, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 11 to 12 July 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 academy'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 December 2016.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose. Although it incorporates all of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection, it has become cumbersome.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2016.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - creating a culture where all pupils, irrespective of background or ability, are valued and are given good opportunities to achieve
 - raising teachers' expectations of how well pupils can achieve
 - keeping a close check on the progress of pupils who are at alternative provision more precisely so that they make the progress of which they are capable
 - ensuring consistent application of school policies
 - ensuring that pupils in the main school and the sixth form are safe and free from harm while on the school site.
- Raise pupils' achievement by:
 - setting challenging targets for all pupils within a school culture of high achievement
 - ensuring that all pupils make faster progress, with a particular focus on accelerating the progress made by boys and disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that all pupils reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - reducing the number of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school
 - reducing the number of disadvantaged pupils who are temporarily excluded from school
 - eradicating low-level disruption
 - ensuring that incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers use the school's new assessment system and other information they have about their pupils to plan lessons that stretch and challenge pupils to achieve their potential
 - sharpening teachers' questioning skills so that pupils can develop a deeper understanding of the concepts being studied and apply that knowledge to a range of contexts
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve.

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 11 July 2017 to 12 July 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, groups of pupils and students, teachers, members of the governing body and trust board and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust.

Inspectors carried out learning walks and a work scrutiny of pupils' books. Either you or a member of your leadership team accompanied inspectors for these activities. Inspectors reviewed all safeguarding policies and practices and checked the single central record.

Context

Since the last inspection, trustees have reduced the size of the local governing body and established a 'rapid improvement committee' to focus on addressing the issues identified. A member of the senior leadership team was given the responsibility for Year 11 disadvantaged pupils. There have been changes to the leadership of sixth form and physical education. A number of teachers have left the school and new teachers have been appointed across different subjects. One of the vice principals leaves the school at the end of the term to take up a headship post in a neighbouring local authority.

As a consequence of the last inspection, the school lost its teaching school status and school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) accreditation. The school remains the lead school in the Queen Katherine School Multi-Academy Trust (QKSMAT).

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders, governors and staff were thunderstruck by the outcome and subsequent report of the last inspection. Nonetheless, you have since brought the whole school community together to recapture the enthusiasm and determination to continue making the necessary changes already begun. Improvements continue to be seen and they have been rapid in some cases.

You immediately set to work on securing the safeguarding procedures. All pupils and students that spoke to the inspectors told them how much safer they feel when on site. You and your staff have also noticed other benefits. For example, there is a reduction in the number of pupils who are late to school and there is less litter to contend with. You also took the opportunity to review and strengthen all of your policies and practices relating to safeguarding. Staff, pupils and students are aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and the need for all to be vigilant. It was reassuring that everyone who inspectors spoke to was very aware that a semi-

rural setting does not make anyone immune to the challenges faced when working to keep children safe.

You have an accurate view of where the school is on its journey out of special measures and how this is to be achieved. You recognise that your most significant challenge is to eradicate the inconsistencies that exist in the quality of teaching and learning. Your approach has been to articulate a culture where all pupils, irrespective of background or ability, are valued and are given opportunities to achieve. All staff and pupils 'buy in' to this but the actions of some prevent this culture from being embedded. Teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are not high enough and school policies are not routinely followed. To address this, you have created a well-structured and fair process to support staff if there are any concerns about their adherence to what is expected of them.

As we discussed, the action plan has become too large and it is difficult to manage. All of the areas that need improving are included but the plan has become more of a list of actions completed or still to do. It needs to be more focused on the identified priorities with measurable impact made clear. This will allow for those monitoring the plan to be very clear about how they will know that actions have been successful and the difference it has made to pupils. We also spoke about the importance of continuing to keep your eye on other aspects of school life that need attention.

An external review of the pupil premium took place in the summer term. This review was helpful in acknowledging what positive changes have been made and the clear focus and priority the school now has on disadvantaged pupils. However, it did not identify the weaknesses in the pupil premium strategy for 2016/17. It was not clear from this strategy how much funding had been allocated for each action, how it would be monitored, by whom, how often and the difference you intended it to make. It is laudable that you do not want to have 'quick fixes'. Inspectors in the last inspection, and this one, clearly saw the improvements for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3. However, governors now need to make sure that the plan for 2017/18 also addresses how best to spend the funding on maximising the chances for disadvantaged pupils in next year's Year 11.

The external review of governance is ongoing. Trustees have taken the review as an opportunity to look again at the structures of governance currently in place. The local governing body has been significantly reduced and the skills and experience are now appropriate for moving forward. Governors exercise the right balance of challenge and support but ought to avoid duplicating their activities. Tighter lines of accountability would address this.

The actions of leaders at all levels so far indicate that there is the capacity to increase the rate at which improvements are happening. There is still much work to be done. You know this and are adamant that it will be done.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There have always been examples of effective teaching at Queen Katherine School. It can be seen in subjects where achievement is at its best. It is the inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning that has resulted in poor outcomes for pupils, especially boys and disadvantaged pupils. Focused actions have resulted in pupils, especially the disadvantaged pupils, making faster progress than they did in the past. The most rapid progress is seen across key stage 3. Nonetheless, the achievement of all pupils should be much higher given pupils' starting points. Teaching is not routinely challenging pupils and teachers' expectations are not sufficiently high. The presentation of pupils' work is, generally, of a poor standard. Graffiti in books is not uncommon and pupils rarely use rulers and pencils to draw graphs and diagrams. You shared with me your plans to address this from September.

On a few occasions, inspectors noted adults' incorrect use of punctuation and misspelling of basic words. This needs to be addressed so as to ensure that all adults model basic literacy skills effectively to pupils all of the time.

Teachers are using assessment information to plan their lessons with greater effect. They are asking questions of pupils that are sharper and this is helping to develop pupils' understanding and knowledge. The more effective use of assessment information has helped to reduce the difference between the performance of boys and girls. This can be seen in most year groups although there are subjects where girls' progress has slowed and the boys have overtaken them.

You shared with inspectors your plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They are suitable but you are under no illusions as to how concerted the effort must be from all staff.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

You and your leaders have taken considerable steps in this area of provision. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour is much better than at the time of the last inspection. Attendance continues to improve for all pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved and fewer of these pupils are regularly absent. Nonetheless, the absence rates of disadvantaged pupils are still too high. Your actions so far indicate that they are slowly proving to be successful and that dogged determination pays off.

Exclusions have decreased even further but disadvantaged pupils account for almost one half. Leaders and governors are looking at how next year's pupil premium funding could be spent to address this. Even though the number of exclusions has decreased, you have not lowered the standards of behaviour expected of pupils. Pupils behave well around the school and in classes. Inspectors saw no low-level

disruption and your own records show a significant reduction in incidents. However, inspectors did see a lack of engagement in lessons where teaching was not meeting the needs of pupils and the work was too easy.

The logs you keep to record incidents of bullying show that they have been dealt with appropriately. All the pupils and students that inspectors spoke to said that they thought bullying rarely happened and when it does, it is dealt with quickly.

You and your leaders are in regular contact with alternative providers. You track the progress of pupils at alternative provision and ensure that they are taught in settings that provide for their well-being and safety. Although the attendance of pupils at alternative provision is tracked more closely, we spoke about making sure that you monitor the attendance of pupils at all sessions.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders have set challenging targets for all pupils. These targets are being used to greater effect so as to improve the quality of teaching. The variable rates of progress reflect the inconsistencies seen in teaching.

Disadvantaged pupils are now making faster progress than before and boys have caught up with girls. However, they are still not achieving what they are capable of. The pupils in this school are bright and articulate and the outcomes do not reflect this. Improvements are most notable in classes where there are high expectations, challenging questions, effective use of assessment information and teaching that matches pupils' abilities. These features are not routinely demonstrated across all year groups and subjects. You have accurately identified the year groups and subjects where progress is a cause for concern.

While a much more positive picture of progress is evident lower down the school, future monitoring visits will focus on the progress of pupils in key stage 4, especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

External support

Most of the support is being provided from within the QKSMAT and from the areas where good practice exists within the school. This support is being validated by external consultants who frequently visit the school and provide pertinent feedback. As mentioned above, an external review of governance is ongoing and an external review of the pupil premium funding has taken place.