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Mr Jon Hayes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hayes

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Queen Katherine School

Following my visit with Julie Bather and David Hampson, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 5 December 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 December 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.

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 multi-academy trust board, 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 second monitoring inspection on 5 December 2017

Evidence

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

Inspectors carried out observations of lessons and looked at pupils' work. Either you or a member of your leadership team accompanied inspectors during these activities. Inspectors checked the single central record.

Because a number of areas for improvement identified at the inspection were considered during my last visit, the inspectors focused on the following: the arrangements for alternative provision, the quality of teaching and learning, and the progress of pupils at key stage 4, especially the disadvantaged pupils and boys.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, a number of new appointments have taken effect. These include an assistant headteacher with responsibility for transition and key stage 3 disadvantaged pupils, new heads of department in English, science and humanities, and various subject teachers. The governing body has also welcomed an additional two members.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have kept up the momentum since my last monitoring visit. The improvements that are evident from provisional 2017 results have acted as a further catalyst for change. Teachers, parents and pupils can see that the changing culture which you set out is having the desired effect. The staff can take genuine satisfaction in the improvements made so far. However, leaders realise that comparisons need to be made with national averages and not with other schools in the local area or with how far the school has come since the last inspection.

Leaders' plans for development are much more manageable and practical. It is now easier for governors to hold leaders to account for their actions. As the school continues to progress out of special measures, the plans need to be even more specific. The plans need to state precisely what aspect of provision needs to improve and how this will be realised.

Leaders have fully addressed the concerns that were raised at the last inspection regarding alternative provision. The systems to check on the attendance and progress of pupils are effective. Leaders communicate with the alternative providers on a daily basis and routinely visit the alternative provisions. Leaders have a good

knowledge and understanding of how well the pupils who attend these settings are doing.

The single central record meets statutory requirements. Leaders continue to build on the improvements made to safeguarding arrangements at the time of my last visit. All policies and practices are up to date and reflect current legislation.

The pupil premium strategy has been rewritten and is much more effective. It is clear that leaders have thought about the common barriers to learning for these pupils, and have chosen strategies that are recognised as bringing about improvements. Leaders spoke with conviction about the changed culture within the school and that the profile of disadvantaged pupils has never been higher. This is imperative because school is often the only beacon and champion that these pupils have. The impact of this is most notable at key stage 3. Leaders have rightly turned their attention to the disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 but the challenges are greater because these pupils have not been a priority in the past.

Since my last visit, the review of governance has taken place. The opportunity was taken to review governance across the multi-academy trust. The recommendations are clearly set out and provide sound advice as to ensuring effective governance. The scheme of delegation and lines of accountability are clearer. Governors fulfil their proper role and are well supported by the trust board. The governing body is made up of skilled and experienced professionals and ably led by the chair. Governors are realistic, open and honest in their approach to school improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that teaching is 'definitely better'. The pupils described to inspectors how teachers have made learning more engaging and challenging. While these improvements have resulted in faster progress for the most able pupils, at times, the work does not accurately meet the needs of the pupils. For example, progress is less secure for the least able pupils. Teachers do not routinely address the misconceptions and misunderstandings that some pupils have in their learning.

Inspectors saw variability in the quality of learning in the lessons observed during this visit. There is no doubt that teachers are putting the professional development that they receive to good use but it is not yet embedded in daily practice. This view was borne out in what was seen in the pupils' work. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see that the quality of presentation in pupils' books is better than at my last visit. The focus on improving teachers' questioning skills and providing effective feedback is also more evident.

The assessment systems are being used effectively and teachers have a much better knowledge of their pupils and are more aspirational for them. This is particularly so for the disadvantaged pupils and this has contributed to them making up for lost

ground in their learning.

Your plans to address the quality of teaching and learning identify all the issues outlined above. Inspectors saw examples of effective teaching and shared leaders' views of where the strengths and weaknesses lie.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour continues to improve and the incidents of low-level disruption are reducing further. The pupils who spoke to the inspectors were unanimous in their opinion that behaviour is better than it has been for some years. However, there is still a very small but persistent group of pupils whose behaviour is a cause for concern. The pupils also told inspectors that bullying is dealt with effectively. The logs and records that were seen by inspectors confirmed this view.

Fewer pupils are being excluded from school. This is because of the consistent application of the behaviour system by teachers and the high expectations that the culture within the school promotes. There is a growing sense of pride among the pupils. But there is still some work to do with a small minority of parents and pupils who are not supportive of leaders' efforts to make the school a better place.

Overall, attendance is in line with the national average. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still too low. Similarly, too many disadvantaged pupils are persistently absent. Leaders have put in place considerable strategies to address this, especially with those who are hardest to reach. The improvements to date have been slow but steady.

Outcomes for pupils

The school community is pleased by the results seen in 2017 which were better than in previous years. This is justified but leaders are, rightly so, not complacent and know that more hard work and graft are needed. The progress made by all pupils is very positive but masks underachievement in a number of areas. For example, the disadvantaged pupils do not achieve well in mathematics, boys make considerably less progress than girls in English, and pupils are underachieving in child development, modern foreign languages and technology. The school's own information indicates that some of these areas of underachievement persist in current Years 10 and 11.

The progress made by pupils in key stage 3 remains strong and bucks many of the trends seen at key stage 4. Leaders are resolute in focusing their attentions on the progress made by pupils in key stage 4 while sustaining the strengths in key stage 3.

External support

The trust has secured the advice and services of a number of external consultants to validate and check the quality of their work. The trust has also encouraged leaders to maintain the links and involvement with a number of national and local organisations. These are valued as additional sources of professional development.