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23 January 2018

Mr Paul Holroyd
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Holroyd

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Forest High School

Following my visit with Steven Colledge, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 10–11 January 2018, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 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.

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 local governing body, the chief executive officer of the South Gloucestershire and Stroud Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that students' achievement accelerates across all subjects, by making sure that:
 - all inadequate teaching is eliminated
 - teachers use information about what students can do to plan work that is at the right level of challenge for different abilities
 - teachers' assessment of students' work is accurate so that underachievement can be identified and tackled
 - teachers' questioning is used to assess students' learning and progress, to challenge and develop students' thinking and to deepen their understanding
 - teachers' marking gives students a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve, and that teachers check that students have improved their work as a result of the advice they have given
 - students practise their writing skills in different subjects
 - pupils use their mathematical skills and knowledge to solve problems across different subjects
 - students' behaviour is managed consistently well, so that poor behaviour is not tolerated and all teachers take swift action to prevent learning being disrupted.
- Raise achievement in all subjects by making sure that:
 - all students, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs (SEN), make the progress they should
 - the achievement of disadvantaged students in the academy improves so that the gap between their achievement and the achievement of other students nationally is closed
 - boys' achievement improves so that the gap in achievement between boys and girls is closed
 - the most able students make at least good progress and achieve well.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - assessment data are accurate across all subjects
 - leaders make more effective use of additional government funding to narrow the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and others in the academy and nationally
 - leaders set out clear guidelines on the teaching of literacy and numeracy across subjects

- subject leaders are held to account for the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their areas of responsibility
- the curriculum more effectively reflects the different abilities of students and that it better supports students' achievement in English, mathematics and science
- leaders at all levels insist on staff applying academy policies consistently, particularly for marking and behaviour.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 January 2018 to 11 January 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the chair of the local governing body and one other governor. A meeting was held with the executive headteacher and the director of learning and leadership from the trust. Inspectors observed learning jointly with senior staff across a range of age groups and subjects. Inspectors met with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and looked at examples of their written work.

Context

The school is part of the South Gloucestershire and Stroud Academy Trust, which comprises a general further education college and three schools, The Forest High School, Pegasus special school and Berkeley Green University Technical College. The headteacher was appointed one year ago in January 2017. He is supported by the executive headteacher and by the director of learning and leadership from the trust, both of whom spend approximately one day a week working at the school.

The subject leader for English left the school in July 2017. Interim leadership of this department was secured through the autumn and a new, permanent subject leader took up her post in January 2018, one week before this monitoring inspection. One other teacher of English was appointed in January. Leadership of the humanities department has been unstable since September 2017. Currently, an interim leader is in place while the school seeks a permanent post holder. Eight new teachers joined the school in September 2017, including teachers in mathematics, French, English, computing and humanities.

Two new governors have been appointed since the previous monitoring inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has consolidated the improvements at the school. Having secured the confidence of the staff and raised their expectations, he is now helping parents to have greater confidence in the school and the quality of education it offers. He models respect for individuals and, as a result, good relationships are being built between staff, pupils and parents throughout the school community. There has been a sharp rise in the number of parents of Year 6 pupils expressing an interest in the school.

The headteacher restructured the senior leadership team in September 2017. All senior leaders have clear roles and responsibilities. They work together well in an atmosphere of trust and so communication within the senior team and with the staff

is effective. Senior leaders have introduced many new initiatives and improved policies over the last year, for example a new system for assessing pupils' attainment and setting targets. This is now well established. Pupils understand what is expected of them because senior leaders have ensured that teachers take a consistent approach to assessment. In some cases, however, these initiatives have not been evaluated sharply enough for senior leaders to understand fully their impact.

Senior leaders are continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They use regular monitoring activities, such as checks on the quality of pupils' work, to accurately identify strengths and weaknesses. The cycle of monitoring activities has been refined, and the probationary programme for new staff has been made more rigorous. As a result, all staff, including senior leaders, are firmly held to account for the quality of their work. Senior leaders tailor training for staff to meet their specific needs. Staff greatly value the training and support they receive. This training is underpinning the improvement in the quality of teaching at the school and the rising achievement of pupils.

Middle leaders' impact on the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility has become more consistent since the previous monitoring inspection. Middle leadership in English and humanities, however, has been less effective than in other subjects. Interim arrangements to cover for staff absence have brought stability to both departments but have not enabled teaching to improve at the rate seen in other areas of the school. The recently appointed leader for English has a clear vision for the future of teaching in this subject. She is ambitious for the pupils and committed to ensuring rapid improvement in their progress. However, having joined the school only days before the inspection, she has not yet had time to make a discernible difference to pupils' achievement.

The chair of the governing body leads a skilled team, which is increasingly confident in challenging senior leaders. The addition of two more governors since September 2017 has ensured that an even greater depth of education experience is available to the group. This experience is being used effectively.

Governors are gaining greater insight into the effectiveness of the school by working closely with leaders. For example, governors' oversight of the use of extra funding to support disadvantaged pupils has improved following changes made last year. They worked with senior leaders to develop a strategy for raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are now implementing this to ensure that all staff are aware of the best approaches to help individual disadvantaged pupils. This strategy has worked well in mathematics. However, governors recognise that more urgency is required in this area of work across the rest of the curriculum.

The school's arrangements for child protection and safeguarding continue to be effective. Pupils feel safe at the school. They are confident in their ability to stay

safe online and to deal with the pressures of social media. The checks on staff's suitability to work with children are thorough and detailed. Staff new to the school receive effective training. They demonstrate a good understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures and their roles in keeping pupils safe.

The headteacher places great emphasis on the importance of vigilance. Since the previous monitoring inspection, he has introduced a new system for keeping records of any concerns that staff may have. This is allowing faster communication between staff and better analysis of information. A more effective system for admitting visitors to the school has recently been introduced. These changes illustrate the headteacher's continual search for improvements to safeguarding procedures.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching continues to improve because teachers are planning activities which are more closely related to the prior attainment of pupils. Better assessment processes are allowing teachers to judge more accurately pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. Collaboration with other schools to check on the accuracy of assessment is paying dividends, particularly in key stage 4.

Teachers are ensuring that learning activities are provided for pupils as soon as they walk through the classroom door. This policy is being applied more consistently than before because middle leaders have made the expectation clear to all staff. As a result, less time is lost at the start of lessons and pupils are more engaged in lessons. Regular professional development meetings allow teachers to share ideas effectively and, therefore, learn from each other. This has played a part in improving the quality of learning activities that teachers use with pupils.

Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to write extended pieces of work across the school. Senior leaders' drive last year to develop these opportunities was a success. Pupils understand the importance of improving their spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, many pupils' literacy skills remain weak and the school's current strategy for developing these skills is not well understood by staff. Similarly, senior leaders have not set out the school's approach to the development of pupils' numeracy skills with enough clarity. As a result, teaching is not specifically addressing the development of numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics.

Pupils understand the academic expectations their teachers have of them because the 'minimum expected grade' system is used consistently across subjects. Middle leaders use information about pupils' previous attainment, and consideration of baseline assessments in Year 7, to set suitable targets for pupils. Most pupils understand their targets and receive good advice from the teachers about how to improve to get to the next grade. However, some teachers' feedback to pupils about their work does not follow the school's policy and so is not specific enough to help them improve.

Teachers are aware of the need to improve the most able pupils' progress. They have been successful in raising the level of challenge for these pupils in some subjects. However, senior leaders acknowledge the need to provide a greater level of challenge for these pupils.

Teaching assistants are used well in lessons to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. They form a committed team, which is dedicated to pupils' welfare and academic achievement. Consequently, these pupils feel well supported and are making good progress from their starting points. Senior leaders are continually looking for improvements to the support the school gives to this group of pupils, based on the latest research findings.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are proud of their school. They generally have good relationships with their teachers and most genuinely give their best effort during lessons. For example, those pupils who find writing difficult respond well when asked to write longer pieces of work, even though this is a challenge for them.

Pupils are cheerful and optimistic. They recognise the improvements that have taken place at the school in the last year. In particular, they said that the headteacher has made a big difference. Pupils are aware that the quality of teaching is improving and welcome the raised level of challenge. Some pupils lack confidence in their own ability and so are reticent when speaking about their work.

Inspectors saw good behaviour during lessons. Most pupils are attentive and follow instructions quickly. Pupils readily support each other with their learning. A minority of pupils' behaviour falls below the standard expected by the school, especially when they are taught by temporary staff. Pupils' conduct around the site is generally calm. Staff supervision at break and lunchtime is better than in the past because staff take firm action when necessary.

As a result of the improvement in the quality of teaching and better engagement of pupils in lessons there are fewer incidents of poor behaviour. The rate of pupils being excluded from school has fallen this year.

The rate of pupils' attendance was in decline but has improved this year as a result of senior leaders' actions. They have raised parents' awareness of the importance of regular attendance. Senior staff act quickly when they notice an individual pupil's attendance rate is beginning to slip and, as a result, problems are often nipped in the bud. The rate of persistent absence has also fallen. However, senior leaders recognise that there is more work to be done to improve pupils' attendance further.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress of pupils measured across eight GCSE subjects was better in 2017 than in 2016. However, it remained well below the national average. Senior leaders' predictions about pupils' exam results in 2017 were accurate. They have a good understanding of the challenge facing them and the areas where the school needs to improve further.

Pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics was in line with the national average in 2016 and improved significantly in 2017. Work in pupils' books and information supplied by the school show that pupils currently in the school are making strong progress in mathematics as a result of the effective teaching in this subject.

Pupils' GCSE results in English, although improved slightly in 2017, were still well below the national average. Turbulence in staffing in English hampered pupils' learning last year. The interim leadership of the department, since September 2017, has secured some improvement and so pupils in key stage 4 have a better understanding of the standard of work expected at GCSE level. A new, permanent leader took up her post in January 2018. It is too early to see the effect of her leadership yet.

Pupils' progress in GCSE science rose in 2017 compared to the previous year. Teaching in science is increasingly focused on the key skills that pupils need to succeed. Pupils feel well prepared for their examinations. However, some pupils still have difficulty describing key scientific concepts, and this slows down their ability to learn new ideas which build on their prior understanding.

Pupils' knowledge and understanding in key stage 3 remain too variable across different subjects. For example, in art, pupils typically demonstrate good coordination to control brush strokes and apply paint effectively while learning about the use of colour. Key stage 3 pupils' ability to use hand tools in design technology is far less well developed. Consequently, pupils of similar ability produce work of significantly different quality in different subject areas.

Disadvantaged pupils' progress improved significantly in 2017. In mathematics, for example, their progress was in line with that of other pupils nationally. In other areas, however, notably in English, disadvantaged pupils' progress in 2017 was still well below that of other pupils nationally.

Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Teachers and teaching assistants have a good understanding of their individual needs and so they are able to provide appropriate extra help for these pupils.

The most able pupils' progress was in line with the national average in 2017. This was an improvement on the progress of this group in 2016. However, the school's

assessments indicate that the most able pupils currently in the school are not making enough progress compared to other pupils with the same starting points.

External support

The executive headteacher from the trust continues to provide effective support for senior leaders. Her expertise has been invaluable, for example enabling the thorough and detailed restructure of the leadership team roles. She ensures that senior leaders are held to account closely for the impact of their work. The executive headteacher has facilitated the introduction of a more rigorous induction programme and probationary period for staff who are new to the school.

The director of learning and leadership from the trust has provided support for the English department in recent months following the departure of the previous subject leader. His influence has brought stability to the department at a time of uncertainty.

The trust employed a management consultant during the autumn term in 2017 to provide support for the headteacher and to increase the capacity of the senior leadership team. This support was used effectively. The trust has expanded in recent months following the opening of two new schools. Sharing of good practice at leadership level is being planned between the three schools in the trust.

The informal support provided to the school by the Dene Magna Teaching School Alliance has continued. Middle leaders in key subjects have benefited from regular contact with colleagues from other schools. This has contributed to the raising of pupils' attainment in these subjects.