

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



8 November 2018

Mr Peter Baker  
Headteacher  
Mount Grace School  
Church Road  
Potters Bar  
Hertfordshire  
EN6 1EZ

Dear Mr Baker

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Mount Grace School**

Following my visit with Bruce Clark and Caroline Dawes, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 23–24 October 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2017.

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’s statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school’s improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard  
**Her Majesty’s Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2017.**

- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - creating more robust development plans which have clear milestones so that leaders and governors can measure their impact rigorously and routinely
  - sharpening monitoring systems so that they take greater account of the progress that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, make when evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
  - training governors so that they are better equipped to challenge leaders over the quality of provision in the school
  - ensuring that leaders and governors routinely evaluate the impact of pupil premium expenditure to better link spending to activities that improve the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, including for the most able disadvantaged pupils
  - supporting middle leaders to strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and achievement in their respective areas.
- Raise achievement by:
  - accelerating the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities so that they attain higher grades by the time that they reach Year 11
  - urgently improving the quality of provision in mathematics and science, so that pupils make better progress from their various starting points.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in key stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form by:
  - ensuring that staff use their understanding of what pupils already know and can do to plan activities which challenge the most able and support the least able to make good progress
  - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons and over time
  - sharing effective assessment practice, particularly in giving feedback to pupils, so that pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work and further their learning.
- Strengthen pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
  - cutting out pupils' casual use of inappropriate language
  - reducing further the poor behaviour that leads to fixed-term exclusions, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities
  - improving the attendance of all pupils and reducing persistent absence, especially for disadvantaged pupils, those who have SEN and/or disabilities

and those who attend alternative provision.

- Improve outcomes in the sixth form by:
  - raising standards in academic subjects
  - improving the attendance and punctuality of students, especially in Year 13
  - sharpening leaders' evaluations of how effective they have been in ensuring that students secure appropriate progression routes in the various types of employment, training or education that they undertake when they leave the sixth form
  - ensuring that a greater proportion of students undertake work experience or work-related learning that is directly related to their aspirations, interests and/or current studies.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 23 October 2018 to 24 October 2018**

### **Evidence**

We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and had discussions with you and other senior and middle leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, four groups of pupils, three members of the governing body and the school's improvement partner. Together with you, we observed pupils at work in lessons. We also scrutinised a sample of pupils' work.

### **Context**

There have been few staffing changes since the previous monitoring visit. There has been stability in staffing at both middle- and senior-leader level.

The governing body's work to identify an appropriate multi-academy trust for the school to join is ongoing.

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

You have continued to develop the capacity of middle leaders to bring about necessary changes, evaluate their effectiveness and plan further improvements. Together with other senior leaders, you are supporting leaders and teachers well as they pursue the school's development plan priorities. Leaders' capacity to secure sustainable improvement is evidenced by the consistency with which staff follow key policies, including when tackling misbehaviour. Important aspects of the school's work are continuing to improve. Typically, pupils attend well, behave appropriately and work hard. Pupils generally feel well supported. One pupil we spoke with stressed that 'whatever you're going through, the staff here stand shoulder to shoulder with you.' Others agreed. Students in the sixth form spoke particularly positively about their experiences, reflecting the considerable improvements leaders have made within this aspect of the school's work.

You have well-developed systems to check the quality of teaching, assessment, pupils' work and their personal development. For the most part, these alert you to aspects of the school's work that need to improve in a timely manner. This means that you and your senior team have a good understanding of what is working well, and where standards are not high enough. You establish high expectations and provide staff with appropriate, well-focused training so that they can make the necessary changes. You are working with the subject leader for mathematics to implement a focused action plan, to improve the consistency of teaching within the subject. It is too soon to establish the impact of this work.

Overall, disadvantaged pupils did not make good progress by the end of key stage 4 in 2018, and their GCSE outcomes were lower than anticipated. You are working to identify and remove any barriers to learning that might limit current disadvantaged Year 11 pupils' progress. You acknowledge that leaders and

teachers do not have as full an understanding as they should of the potential barriers to learning faced by younger disadvantaged pupils. This is limiting your ability to tailor support with precision so that it meets these pupils' needs. Leaders have yet to complete their evaluation of the difference made by the school's use of pupil premium funding in 2017/18. Nor have they agreed their priorities for the use of this funding during the current academic year with the governing body. Provision for disadvantaged pupils and their subsequent achievement were both areas for improvement identified in the school's previous inspection. Leaders' and governors' actions are not showing enough impact on improving disadvantaged pupils' achievement.

Governors have challenged you and other leaders over the accuracy of some of the information that they have had in the past about disadvantaged pupils' progress and their anticipated public examination outcomes. They support your plan to enable teachers to work with their colleagues at a local school and check the accuracy of each other's grading of Year 11 mock examination answers. In recent months, governors have sharpened further their monitoring of aspects of the school's work, including that relating to behaviour and attendance.

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

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve. Many subject leaders are making changes to the key stage 3 curriculum that are beginning to help pupils develop the knowledge and skills they will need to do well at key stage 4. Subject leaders' analysis of pupils' work indicated that in the past, many pupils have not applied their knowledge well when answering questions requiring lengthy or complex responses. Pupils appreciate the precise guidance teachers are giving them about how to meet the requirements of these and other kinds of examination questions.

Analysis of pupils' written work at key stage 3 indicates that most teachers are promoting the development of pupils' literacy skills by encouraging them to understand and use subject-specific language, and to spell, punctuate and use grammar with accuracy. However, aside from in English, many pupils have too few opportunities to write at length when responding to challenging questions that require deeper thought.

In most subjects, teachers plan tasks to challenge the most able. These often promote the progress of these pupils well, though younger pupils told us that sometimes their work is no more demanding than it was at key stage 2. At times, activities do not ensure that the most able think hard to deepen or broaden their knowledge. Sometimes this is because teachers ask searching questions but give pupils too little time to think before they answer them. Sometimes teachers accept brief responses from pupils and go on to develop the explanations themselves. This limits pupils' ability to develop their thinking, and the ability of their teachers to assess their understanding. At times, teachers, including those in the sixth form, are too quick to move pupils on to the next activity, limiting time spent in productive discussion and debate.

Teachers implement the school's assessment policy consistently. Within lessons, teachers often use regular verbal feedback. This is typically clear. The extent to which pupils are given, and take, the opportunity to respond to feedback in a timely manner remains variable. This means that too often pupils do not make the necessary changes. In addition, teachers are not always alert to pupils' misconceptions. In these instances, pupils' mistakes are neither identified nor corrected, so they continue.

Staffing within science is now stable. The recently appointed subject leader is working with other colleagues to implement the subject improvement plan. Pupils' outcomes at GCSE in 2018 were too variable. Some pupils made too little progress owing to a legacy of previous weak teaching. Within science, teachers are working as a team to identify and remove any gaps in knowledge that persist for current pupils. Leaders are making well-judged changes to the key stage 3 curriculum so that pupils gain a sound understanding of the principles of scientific enquiry as well as the opportunity to complete more practical and investigative work. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to explain things clearly. At times, however, some key stage 4 pupils find the text they are given difficult to understand, which slows their progress. Pupils receive detailed feedback after the science assessments that they complete periodically, though interim feedback is less evident.

Students learn well in mathematics in the sixth form and make good progress because teaching is effective. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and pupils understand the importance of mathematics and want to do well. At key stage 3 and key stage 4, however, the quality of teaching remains too variable. Pupils have many opportunities to practise their mathematics skills, but too often teachers do not check pupils' understanding carefully enough. Because of this, pupils' misconceptions are not always identified, so their errors go uncorrected and the depth of their mathematical understanding is limited. Too often the least able struggle with more basic concepts and problems, and the most able complete work that is not demanding enough. Many pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills are underdeveloped.

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

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. Since the first monitoring visit, you have further reduced the proportion of pupils who have been temporarily excluded from school or placed in internal isolation. This reflects the continuing decline in both serious incidents of misbehaviour and disruption to learning. You have worked particularly effectively with pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour. Pupils who spoke with us were firmly of the view that behaviour has improved markedly, including during social times around the school's large site – though pupils often do not travel across it with urgency as they move between lessons. However, sometimes pupils do not work hard, and disrupt the learning of others. Typically, this is either because they are unsure of what they need to do or because activities are insufficiently challenging or engaging.

Pupils told us that the casual use of inappropriate language they too often heard in the past is now uncommon. They continue to think that bullying is typically dealt with effectively on the rare occasion that it does happen. Your monitoring information, and the views of parents and carers, confirm this. Instances of racial or homophobic bullying remain exceptionally rare.

The improvements in pupils' attendance evident at the time of the first monitoring visit have been maintained. Leaders respond very quickly if pupils are absent. Pupils told us that leaders do all that they can to get them back to school quickly. Pupils who are unavoidably absent for longer periods receive work to do at home. This helps to stop them falling behind in their learning. Attendance in the sixth form continues to be very high; leaders are quick to intervene if a student's attendance starts to fall. Overall, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is continuing to decline. The same is true for different groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Pupils feel, and are, safe at school because safeguarding arrangements continue to be secure and effective. Leaders ensure that the correct pre-employment checks are carried out upon those appointed to work at the school. Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training, which ensures that they know how to spot signs that a pupil may be at risk. They report any concerns in a timely manner, and leaders work well with external agencies to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support. Pupils learn about different risks and how to minimise these; they also develop essential skills that help promote their personal development. In the sixth form, for example, students learn about how to manage their personal finances and how to cook healthy meals on a budget, as part of the school's personal development programme.

Many pupils make a positive contribution to the school community by taking up positions of responsibility that promote their personal development well. All sixth-form students volunteer for at least one hour per week, for example helping in lower-school lessons, serving as sports leaders or raising money for charity. All sixth-form students engage in relevant work-related learning. Many students told us about the ways in which attending conferences or presentations has helped in their preparation to access careers within hospitality, events management or the Royal Navy, for example. You have detailed plans in place to increase the proportion of students who complete work experience that is relevant to their interests and ambitions, but currently only a small proportion do so.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Overall, pupils' progress at GCSE in 2018 was in line with that of pupils nationally, as was the case in 2017. Too few pupils made good progress or achieved highly within science or mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils' progress was low overall. The school's analysis of the 2018 results indicates that Year 13 students typically made the progress that they should have, given their individual starting points. The school's records indicate that current sixth-form students are making good

progress overall. This is the result of effective teaching and appropriate careers information and guidance, which helps to ensure that students study appropriate courses, given their abilities and interests.

At key stages 3 and 4, pupils' progress remains inconsistent. In some subjects, notably English, it is particularly strong. In science, stable staffing and increasingly effective teaching are promoting stronger progress. In mathematics, too few pupils are making the progress that they should, sometimes because their knowledge is not secure, but more usually because their ability to reason mathematically and to apply their knowledge to problem-solving tasks is limited. At key stage 4, teachers are showing pupils how to respond to questions that require them to 'analyse', 'explain' or 'discuss'. However, typically teachers are doing too little to ensure that key stage 3 pupils develop their extended writing skills.

The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who make good progress from their individual starting points has increased markedly since the previous inspection. In some subjects, including mathematics, they make more progress than other pupils with the same starting points. Pupils who need it receive intensive and effective literacy support. Teaching assistants typically support these pupils well within the classroom and in additional sessions that accelerate their progress. The progress that disadvantaged pupils make is more variable.

You have identified that a small number of pupils who do not have SEN and/or disabilities join the school with low levels of literacy and that this is limiting their progress across a range of subjects. Subject leaders are reviewing the texts that these pupils are given to ensure that the language within them is not overly complex. You have also started to provide more intensive support for these pupils, but the full impact of this work is not yet evident.

### **External support**

You and your leaders are continuing to make use of external subject experts, including the school's improvement partner, to promote improvements in a number of subjects, including mathematics. You have scheduled an external review of governance, to take place in the spring term. This will include an evaluation of the impact of governors' work with leaders to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils.