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Mr Del Planter
Marlwood School
Vattingstone Lane
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Dear Mr Planter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Marlwood School

Following my visit with Will Morgan, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 6–7 November 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2017. 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 board of trustees, the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for South Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2017.

- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - urgently improving governance, so that school leaders are held to account for pupils' progress and for the spending of targeted funding, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding
 - improving senior and middle leaders' skills by providing them with training to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that middle leaders are held to account for the progress of pupils in the areas they lead
 - improving the rigour of performance management of staff
 - developing the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all pupils
 - improving communication with parents
 - developing a culture of sharing good practice that exists within the school and implementing the systems required to achieve this.
- Improve teaching, and raise pupils' achievement by:
 - taking urgent action to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of
 - ensuring that teachers provide learning which meets the needs of pupils, based on accurate and appropriate assessment of their prior learning
 - ensuring that the needs of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are met
 - providing pupils with activities that deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding, particularly for the most able.
- Improve the personal development behaviour and welfare of pupils by:
 - improving the attendance of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to at least the national average.

External reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management might be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 6 November 2018 to 7 November 2018

Evidence

During this inspection, inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' books to monitor learning together with senior leaders. They examined school documents and met with the headteacher, the chief executive officer (CEO), and members of the interim executive committee (local governing body). They met with senior and middle leaders, and with groups of pupils.

On this visit, inspectors focused particularly on the progress school leaders have made in improving teaching, learning and assessment across the school.

Context

The previous headteacher has left the school since the last visit and the deputy headteacher has been appointed as interim headteacher. A new deputy headteacher has also joined the school. More than a third of the teaching staff started at the beginning of the autumn term. The planned restructuring of middle leadership responsibilities has been implemented.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher has acted rapidly to accelerate the rate of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning that is required for the removal of special measures. His enthusiasm for the task ahead and his openness to discussion has ensured that staff and pupils are supportive of his plans. As a result, there is a renewed sense of impetus. The new senior leadership team has responded to the points raised in the previous monitoring visit report. Revised plans are clear and teachers understand what they are trying to achieve and they are beginning to have a better sense of how they should go about achieving it.

The headteacher and his senior team have successfully raised the profile of teaching and learning by working with individual teachers directly to improve their classroom practice. They have asked staff to reflect on their own strengths and areas for development and to choose a focus for improvement from a wide menu. Senior leaders are now working with teachers on their chosen area on a regular basis to develop and support their practice. This has been an effective strategy because it has rapidly engaged staff and ensured that they are keen to improve their practice. The headteacher is now beginning to focus attention on improving two or three key areas of classroom practice. This will allow more rapid improvement across the whole school.

Senior leaders are working with middle leaders to improve their skills in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. This is making middle leaders more effective

in their role. Regular leadership meetings, focused on the quality of teaching and pedagogy, are also supporting leaders' drive to improve classroom practice.

Leaders are now analysing the performance of disadvantaged pupils with more rigour. This has allowed them to target support to individuals more accurately and to improve the attendance of this group of pupils. However, teachers still do not typically provide pupils with the extra help they need in lessons to help them make progress in line with other pupils. Leaders have identified the poor progress of disadvantaged boys as a priority.

Leaders are considering changes to the key stage 4 curriculum. However, there are some issues that will take time to resolve. For example, leaders are looking to remove the current 'fast track' GCSE option for future year groups. Currently, this option prevents some pupils reaching the highest grades. This legacy of underachievement will take time to work through the key stage 4 outcomes. Leaders are also currently reviewing the key stage 3 curriculum. This is an important step, and it will lay the ground for improved standards in the future.

The trust and chief executive officer (CEO) continue to provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders. After the section 5 inspection that led to the judgement that the school required special measures, the local governing body was replaced by an interim executive committee (IEC), chaired by the CEO. This arrangement was appropriate at the time. The IEC is small but consists of experienced and skilled professionals. It monitors the work of leaders effectively. The CEO is aware that, as the school nears reinspection, the IEC will need to be converted into a long-term local governing body if it is to remain effective in supporting the school's recovery.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains too inconsistent. However, there are a number of positive signs that improvements are beginning to have an impact. Some teachers are raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve. They are challenging pupils to go beyond a superficial first answer and think more deeply about their work. Where teachers ask good questions that encourage pupils to push themselves, pupils make good progress. In history and GCSE physical education (PE), for example, pupils are asked to explain and justify their answers. Pupils enjoy this and respond enthusiastically. Standards are rising as a result. However, pupils report that they are frustrated that this level of challenge is not present in many other subjects.

Some pupils are now making better progress because the advice they get from teachers about how to improve their work is increasingly precise. This is an area that some staff are focusing on particularly, and their work is having an impact. However, the quality of advice is too inconsistent between subjects. The importance that teachers attach to improving work also varies between subjects. In some

subjects, for example in English, pupils are given the time to absorb the teacher's advice and improve their work. In others, pupils are not given the time and so the advice is wasted.

There remains too much inconsistency between the quality of teaching within some departments. Pupils told inspectors that the progress they make depends too much on which teacher they happen to have. Senior leaders are aware that middle leaders must be in the forefront of monitoring and supporting colleagues to address this issue.

Teachers are now making more reliable assessments of pupils' work. They are benefiting from trust-wide assessment procedures at key stage 4. Staff are also working with colleagues in other trust schools to moderate pupils' work. Leaders are now more confident in the end of term progress information they receive from teachers. The same procedures are not yet in place for key stage 3. This is preventing teachers and leaders from having the same degree of clarity about the progress pupils are making. This prevents them from precisely targeting the next steps in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

There has been a significant improvement in the attendance of all pupils, and particularly of disadvantaged pupils. The number who are persistently absent has fallen markedly. This is an area of real success for school leaders and staff. They have been successful because they have put strong systems in place and staff have followed through with great resolve and persistence. They have made their expectations of pupils clear and put support in place to help families who have additional barriers to overcome.

Outcomes for pupils

The provisional GCSE outcomes for 2018 show a small improvement on those for 2017. However, pupils continue to make less progress than do pupils in other schools. Progress is below that in other schools in English and the majority of other subjects. It is broadly in line with the national average in mathematics. In 2018, disadvantaged pupils made less progress than in 2017. Pupils in school currently are still underachieving. However, there are significant improvements in some subjects, notably history.

External support

The trust has provided much of the support the school has received. The extensive changes to the leadership team are largely the result of the movement of staff between trust schools. The trust also provides a strong training programme for staff.

The school is now receiving external support from a project, including a number of local schools, that is focused on developing the quality of leadership to address the underachievement of disadvantaged pupils. This has been used to support the development of middle leaders.