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Mrs Rae Cope
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cope

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ridgewood High School

Following my visit with Hugh Bishop, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 December 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 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 February 2018.

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 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 board of trustees, and the chief executive of the Stour Vale Academy Trust (SVAT), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2018

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - setting precise criteria to judge the success of school improvement plans, including the pupil premium strategy, so that leaders and governors can identify quickly when their policies and actions are not having the intended impact
 - securing effective senior leadership and the leadership of all subject areas
 - improving governance, so that school leaders are held rigorously to account for pupils' progress and for the spending of targeted funding, including pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding
 - strengthening the curriculum to ensure that it develops pupils' deep understanding of the topics being studied.
- Improve teaching across the school, but particularly in science and French, so that all groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, make consistently good progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers' assessments are accurate and used effectively to plan learning
 - teachers have consistently high expectations and plan lessons where learning is engaging and effective, and prepares pupils for the new and more demanding GCSEs
 - teachers deal with low-level disruption more effectively
 - teachers use information about pupils' special educational needs to ensure that teaching meets their needs
 - there is greater awareness of strategies to overcome barriers in learning for disadvantaged pupils in order to plan activities that help them to learn.
- Raise standards in pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving attendance, especially of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
 - further developing the behaviour system to ensure that staff use it consistently and effectively within lessons
 - ensuring that all staff receive statutory safeguarding training
 - implementing a coordinated plan for teaching personal, health, social, citizenship and economic (PHSCE) education including the dangers presented by those with extreme views.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 December 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, the chief executive of SVAT, members of the SVAT board of directors and members of the local governing body (LGB). Inspectors spoke with many pupils at breaktime, lunchtime and during lessons.

Context

Since the previous inspection, SVAT has set up an accelerated improvement board (AIB) comprising trust directors, its chief executive, the chair of the LGB and an external consultant. The AIB's remit is to provide regular scrutiny and challenge on those areas identified for improvement in the section 5 inspection report. It meets twice each term. The school's LGB has been reconstituted. It retains a broad remit, as defined by the school's scheme of delegation.

One assistant headteacher has left the school and two have joined the senior leadership team. Both were appointed from outside the school. The roles of senior leaders have been revised, particularly their responsibilities for leading teaching and learning, behaviour and safeguarding. New leadership of PHSCE education has been put in place. Four teachers have left the school and two experienced science teachers have joined. The school is fully staffed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The early signs of improvement, reported in the inspection report of February 2018, have now developed into clear evidence of ongoing improvement in several areas of school life, including behaviour and teaching. New appointments to the senior leadership team, alongside revised responsibilities, have added to its capacity and effectiveness. The headteacher is well supported by senior leaders. She provides clear, direct and strong leadership. Staff appreciate her clarity of vision and they are keen to be part of the school's improvement. Morale is good.

Senior leaders know the school well. Their evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate and they have put in place effective plans to address its weaknesses. Consequently, improvement is already evident in several areas. Teaching is beginning to improve because leaders have made clear their expectations of teachers' planning. Additionally, leaders have recruited experienced teachers and are providing regular training for all staff. Leaders have made 'getting to know your pupils' a priority for all staff. Leaders have revised the school's behaviour policy, with a clear focus on improving pupils' attitudes to learning. Consequently, the amount of low-level disruption in lessons has reduced.

The weaknesses in safeguarding, identified in the section 5 inspection report, have

been successfully addressed. Staff have now received additional training in many aspects of safeguarding, including the signs that pupils might be vulnerable to radicalisation or extremism. Staff are knowledgeable and alert to the signs that pupils might need extra help, passing on any concerns speedily. Leaders have revised the weekly PHSCE programme so that pupils are taught about the potential dangers that can arise from people with extreme views.

Middle leaders form a committed and hard-working team, determined to see improvement in their subjects. They are well supported by senior leaders. They are beginning to use assessment information to identify pupils who are falling behind with their work. Although they are aware of weaknesses in teaching within their departments, they are not always able to identify what those specific weaknesses are and therefore what should be done to remedy them. This task currently falls to senior leaders.

Leaders' use of the pupil premium, having been ineffective, is at a very early stage of development. Teachers now know who the disadvantaged pupils in their classes are. Senior and middle leaders made these pupils a high priority in the summer, as GCSE examinations approached, and their outcomes improved as a result. Staff know that current disadvantaged pupils remain a high priority. The review of pupil premium use, recommended in the section 5 inspection report, is underway and nearly complete. Consequently, although a written strategy and spending plan exist, leaders are still to determine how effective their pupil-premium funded strategies are being.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is improving but still has weaknesses, particularly in teachers' planning to meet these pupils' needs. Since September 2018, leaders have provided teachers with helpful information about pupils with SEND. This is in the form of a single-page 'passport', containing suggested classroom strategies to meet these pupils' needs. Leaders expect teachers to have looked at these documents but have not checked that this is the case. Some teachers are now making use of this information when they plan classroom activities, but others are not.

The school has a comparatively large number of children looked after. Responsibility for the welfare of these pupils and their academic progress has, until very recently, rested with different leaders. This has meant that, although they have been well cared for, too little emphasis has been placed on their academic progress. Leaders have put new arrangements into place, but it is too early to judge their effectiveness.

Leaders have addressed weaknesses in the curriculum identified in the section 5 inspection report. Early entry for GCSE subjects has ceased and pupils are to be given more choice in their GCSE options, particularly about whether to study French and separate sciences. Consequently, the key stage 4 curriculum is now better placed to support pupils' achievement, but it is too soon to see evidence of impact

from these changes.

Governance has improved considerably since the section 5 inspection. The AIB provides effective support and challenge for leaders. Its members know the school well and focus sharply on those areas that need to improve. The formation of the AIB has contributed well to the school's improvement and has ensured that effective governance has been in place over recent months. The newly reconstituted LGB has met on only a few occasions and is developing. It contains appropriate expertise and its members are committed to seeing the school improve. It carries out its oversight of finance and safeguarding diligently. Leaders have decided to commission the external review of governance, recommended in the section 5 inspection report, next term after the LGB has become more established. Inspectors agree that this timing is appropriate.

SVAT has been instrumental in the school's improvement over the past 10 months. It has put in place the headteacher; provided the AIB; increased leadership capacity; and commissioned a wide range of support for the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is very variable across the school but has improved since the section 5 inspection. Leaders have introduced clear expectations about how lessons should start, and teachers are consistently adhering to these expectations. Many pupils who spoke to inspectors said that teaching is better this year than last. Several cited the better start to lessons as a reason for this, as well as the school's recruitment of some experienced staff. Relationships are generally positive across the school, and leaders' insistence that staff should 'know their pupils' has contributed well to this. Teachers' increasing awareness and prioritisation of disadvantaged pupils is beginning to see their progress improve.

The section 5 inspection highlighted weakness in several subjects. Teaching in mathematics and English is now, for the most part, effective. It is variable, but improving, in science. In French, its quality remains mixed. Expectations of the quality, quantity and presentation of work that pupils produce in lessons across most subjects remains variable. Some teachers have high expectations while others do not.

Where teaching remains weak, teachers do not match activities well to pupils' abilities or what they already know and understand. Sometimes, this means that most-able pupils find the work too easy and do not learn as much as they could. At other times, the work is too difficult and so pupils are unable to attempt it successfully. When pupils cannot do the work set, they sometimes become distracted and low-level disruption ensues. Inspectors observed several instances where this was the case. Where teaching was stronger, inspectors did not observe any low-level disruption of learning.

The quality of teachers' checks on pupils' learning in lessons is very mixed. Some

teachers carefully check that pupils understand what they are learning, through skilful questioning. Other teachers do not check that pupils understand their work and so are unaware that they are finding work too easy or too hard or that they have simply misunderstood a concept.

Although teachers now have access to information about pupils with SEND, their use of it to inform planning is variable. Some teachers appear to be unaware of pupils' SEND or they lack the skill to put into place strategies to meet these pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils with SEND continue to make weaker progress than they should.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Some low-level disruption of lessons remains, but its prevalence is reducing. This is because teaching is improving, relationships between pupils and their teachers are positive and teachers are using the school's revised behaviour policy increasingly consistently. The great majority of pupils behave well in lessons. They are keen to do well and are engaging increasingly well with their learning.

Pupils are mostly courteous and polite to each other and to adults. At breaktime, lunchtime and between lessons pupils generally behave sensibly and maturely. The school is calm and orderly throughout the day.

Attendance is very similar to the national average for secondary schools. Revised procedures to promote good attendance and address poor attendance are beginning to have an impact on the attendance of pupils and groups of pupils who do not attend school regularly. For example, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which has been considerably lower than that of others over recent years, has improved this year.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school. Inspectors spoke with many pupils, in all year groups, during the inspection. Almost all told inspectors they feel safe in school. They said that bullying is very rare. They expressed confidence in staff to deal with bullying or any other problem they might have. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from a range of potential dangers, for example when using social media or from people with extreme views.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional GCSE results for 2018, although still weak, showed improvements in several areas, when compared with the previous year. Outcomes in mathematics improved considerably and those in science and history also improved, but to a lesser extent. Pupils also made better progress than previously in several other subjects including drama, dance, food and nutrition, sociology and art. Disadvantaged pupils made better progress than in the previous year in most subjects, although their outcomes still lag behind those of other pupils in the school.

and nationally.

Several groups of pupils and subjects with weak GCSE outcomes remain. Pupils with SEND made weak progress and boys' outcomes were considerably weaker than those of girls in almost all subjects. Despite better teaching, outcomes in English did not improve as anticipated. Pupils' progress in French and product design remained very weak.

In those areas where teaching is improving, the progress of current pupils is beginning to improve accordingly. However, the extent of improvement varies considerably between subjects and sometimes within subjects.

External support

SVAT has provided the school with support in several areas. Much has already proved effective but for some, its impact is yet to be seen. Support with behaviour management has seen the prevalence of low-level disruption reduce and pupils' attitudes to learning improve. Support with mathematics and science leadership and teaching has seen teaching and outcomes improve in these subjects. Support for the English department is contributing well to improving teaching but has yet to improve outcomes.