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Mr Lee Tristham
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Dear Mr Tristham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Charlton School

Following my visit with Richard Ellis and Helen Reeves, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 8–9 March 2016, 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 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.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children’s Services for Telford & Wrekin Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
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 all students, especially disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs and the most-able students, make good or better progress by ensuring that teachers:
 - have high expectations of what students should achieve in lessons, in particular of the quantity and quality of work that students produce
 - plan lessons that challenge and interest students and cause them to think deeply and work hard, so that they are engaged in their learning and low-level disruption is eliminated
 - plan lessons that enable disabled students or those who have special educational needs to make progress, by making sure that they take into account what these students already understand and can do
 - provide students with marking and feedback that is regular and which helps them to improve their work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, so that there is rapid improvement in the achievement of students, especially disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs and the most-able students, by ensuring that:
 - all leaders and governors have a correct view of the school's strengths and weaknesses based upon detailed and accurate evaluations of teaching, achievement and behaviour
 - improvement plans urgently address students' underachievement
 - aspirational attainment targets are set that raise expectations of what all students should achieve
 - teachers are able to make accurate assessments of students' attainment
 - leaders and teachers are set targets for their work that are clearly focused on the school's urgent need to raise standards
 - training for individual teachers is based on an accurate evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses and is targeted to have maximum impact on improving achievement
 - all subject leaders have the skills and capacity to improve teaching and raise standards in their subjects
 - the pupil premium grant is spent effectively to rapidly improve the progress of disadvantaged students
 - the progress that disabled students or those who have special educational needs are making, both in lessons and through extra support, is carefully tracked
 - governors have the knowledge and skills that mean they are not reliant on school leaders for their understanding of the school's performance, and are therefore able to hold leaders properly to account.

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 8–9 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents and pupils' work. They met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, pupils, members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a local leader of education (LLE) and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since my last visit, two new senior posts have been created to increase the capacity of the senior leadership team. A new Head of English has been appointed for Easter and three new teachers have joined the department.

The school is expecting to move to a new building in May of this year. Plans are in place to minimise disruption to pupils' education, particularly for Year 11.

Leaders are awaiting an academy order, which will lead to the expected change of status in July.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since my last visit, the impact of leaders on improving outcomes for pupils has increased. This is because there is now a clear, strategic vision for school improvement, together with a more robust understanding of the remaining weaknesses that need to be tackled and how this will be achieved. This vision is being driven by the effective IEB and the LLE, who will be the Executive Principal following conversion to academy status.

Recently, the IEB has been further strengthened to ensure that experience and expertise in school improvement is well represented on the board and supports the work of the LLE in building and improving the capacity of the school leaders, clarifying roles and responsibilities and ensuring the right resources are in place. For example, the sourcing and purchase of new software has further improved the collection, analysis and use of assessment information. As a result, during this visit, school leaders were able to provide progress information for all year groups and to demonstrate how this is informing actions to secure sustained improvement in outcomes over time, including for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability.

The higher expectations of the quality of teaching and learning are now more securely established across the school and staff at all levels are responding positively. This is particularly noticeable at middle leadership level because the interim deputy headteacher who leads on this area has ensured that there are clearly defined expectations and has provided opportunities for middle leaders to develop the skills required. Consequently, curriculum leaders say that they now

have much greater clarity about their role and responsibilities; about how they will be held to account for the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility; and of how they are expected to hold others to account. For example, curriculum leaders now carry out regular monitoring activities to check the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. However, as we agreed, these activities are not frequent enough to quickly identify and tackle underperformance or where good practice has been developed and could be shared. In addition, although curriculum leaders are fully aware of the activities they are expected to undertake, they have less understanding of what to do when underperformance is not quickly rectified.

An emerging strength in the school is the effectiveness of pastoral managers. They monitor pupils' behaviour and absence regularly and analyse this information to identify emerging patterns of behaviour. As a result, they are able to identify potential problems at an early stage which informs the additional support put in place. The strong relationships pastoral managers have built with pupils and their families ensure that pupils in their care are well looked after and that they can plan effectively for their needs, including through regular multi-agency meetings. Pupils clearly appreciate their work, describing them as the 'go to people' if they have a problem.

The special needs coordinator has worked strategically to improve provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. As a result of a useful audit of teachers' needs, she has provided carefully planned training to support teachers in developing a range of strategies and resources to better support these pupils in the classroom. Early indications are that this will have a positive impact on further improving outcomes for this group.

Training for teachers is mainly focused on whole-school priorities. Teachers appreciate the provision, but say that they would like to have more training that targets their specific needs and more opportunities to see good practice in action. Leaders are currently analysing the responses staff have provided to a recent questionnaire in order to identify where they can improve training.

Currently, the school is still at the planning stage for implementation of the new curriculum and the assessment system that will underpin it. A new appointment reporting to the senior leadership team is beginning to accelerate the progress being made towards this and leaders expect that it will be implemented next term. However, we agreed that work to ensure that staff, pupils and parents have a thorough understanding of the changes to come, and how that will affect reporting of progress, should be a priority.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has now been completed. Overseen by the interim headteacher and the IEB, an action plan is now being developed to ensure that this funding has a measurable impact on improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

As noted above, the IEB and the LLE are working closely with the local authority and the Department for Education to finalise plans to move to academy status.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Although the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good enough, there has been improvement since my last visit. The work done by leaders to tackle issues around planning has successfully refocused teachers on the requirement to plan appropriately for the needs of different groups and abilities. In nearly all cases, planning demonstrated that consideration had been given to this. However, in the vast majority of lessons, the level of stretch and challenge is defined by providing more work, rather than harder work, and seldom takes into account pupils' starting points. Consequently, it remains the case that the most-able pupils are not being challenged enough in too many of their lessons.

Where planning is well structured and time is used efficiently, pupils make more rapid progress because the teacher is driving the pace of learning rather than the pupils. In these cases too, pupils can articulate their learning because learning objectives are clearly explained. However, where progress is weaker, teachers do not ensure that pupils know what they are learning and the skills they should be developing. This is because too often teachers explain the task they are setting rather than what pupils are expected to learn.

Inspectors and senior leaders agreed that where teaching is most effective, and where pupils make the most progress, teachers use carefully targeted questioning to elicit a deeper level of response and develop understanding. However, in some instances, questioning is superficial and mainly consists of closed questions which do not require pupils to think hard about their answers. In some cases, teachers do not make sure that pupils know they are expected to participate in discussion because they only require those with their hands up to do so.

Inspectors noted significant improvement in the quality of teaching over time in English. For instance, in a Year 8 English lesson, pupils were asked to discuss the role of a father in a family. This was skilfully developed to prepare pupils to explore the relationships within *A Midsummer Night's Dream* between a father and his daughter. In a Year 11 lesson, where many of the pupils had special educational needs, good progress was made because the teacher set high expectations and supported these through carefully planned activities that enabled pupils to explore and test out their ideas and responses through well-led discussion.

Aspects of good practice were also noted by inspectors in a number of other subjects, including history, science and physical education lesson. For example, in a Year 9 physical education lesson, the teacher had provided clear statements linked to developing skills in handball and dodge ball so that pupils could select those areas they specifically needed to improve. As a result, pupils made rapid progress from their starting points. We agreed that leaders now need to make sure that such examples become more consistent across and within subject areas.

Inspectors examined pupils' books in lessons and looked at a larger sample from English and mathematics. In the majority of examples, there was evidence of higher expectations of presentation and of pupils being required to correct errors. In some subjects, including English, history and science, there was also more evidence of extended writing and effective written feedback from teachers which helped pupils to improve subsequent pieces of work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The driving enthusiasm of the interim deputy headteacher leading the new systems, policies and procedures for personal development, behaviour and welfare is leading to a far more consistent approach to managing behaviour and robust tracking of improvements secured and their impact. Data is now routinely analysed for emerging patterns of behaviour and is increasingly well used to inform subsequent actions. Regular meetings between key leaders to share information are driving continual improvement. Consequently, behaviour around the school and at different times of the day is improving. For instance, following a focus on reducing the use of bad language, the number of incidents reported has decreased significantly. A review of lunchtime arrangements has had a similar impact on reducing the number of senior leader 'call outs' for poor behaviour.

Although instances of low-level disruption in lessons remain, this is now managed more consistently. As a result, the vast majority of staff and pupils agree that behaviour has improved substantially across the school. Pupils say that they understand which behaviours will lead to sanctions and believe that these are fair. The exception to this is a small group of the most-able pupils in Key Stage 4. Leaders agree that further investigation is required to identify the reasons for this.

Overall attendance remains in line with national figures and is better than national averages for several key groups. New software is proving useful in being able to analyse information about absence and punctuality, which in turn enables the school to action plan towards further improvement. The school has been particularly successful in improving punctuality to school and to lessons.

Outcomes for pupils

Although not all aspects of the new system for checking pupils' progress are fully functional yet, leaders are now more able to monitor the achievement of all year groups. Therefore, despite the continuing focus on the current Year 11, this is not now to the exclusion of other year groups. Consequently, sustained improvement is now much more 'on the cards' because additional help is provided from Year 7 onwards where required. Currently this is not monitored in the same way as at Year 11, but leaders are aware of gains made as a result. We agreed that the next step is to ensure that additional support in all year groups is monitored for impact in the same way and that information is incorporated in whole-school progress reports once the new recording system is fully functional.

The school's records of pupils' achievement show evidence that rates of progress are improving. This is particularly the case further down the school and particularly in Year 7. Here, rates of progress are improving significantly overall and gaps are closing for disadvantaged pupils. In some subjects, this group is making better progress than others in the school. This is because improvements to collecting and analysing assessment information and its more effective use are ensuring earlier identification by curriculum leaders so that additional support can be identified.

There is clear evidence that the progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is improving in English and mathematics across year groups. The impact of highly targeted support is clear because it is carefully monitored for each pupil.

The latest school assessment point showed that the current Year 11 are ahead of the 2015 cohort at this time of the year. The 2016 target for five GCSE grades at A* to C including English and mathematics is challenging but leaders are confident that, as a result of targeted additional support, the next assessment in March will demonstrate the more rapid progress that will enable them to meet this target. The evidence seen by inspectors suggests that this is achievable.

External support

The school has benefited from a range of external support, including from the LLE, who will become Executive Principal when the academy order is confirmed. In the interim period, the local authority is providing effective support and challenge with an emphasis on ensuring that there is a coordinated approach to improvement from the range of partners involved. Regular reviews of progress from local authority officers are sharply focused on what has been achieved and what needs to happen next to secure the required improvement. School leaders and the IEB are appreciative of their work.