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Ms Jackie Cooper
Headteacher
William Allitt School
Sunnyside
Newhall
Swadlincote
DE11 0TL

Dear Ms Cooper

Special measures monitoring inspection of William Allitt School

Following my visit with Jeremy Seymour, Additional Inspector, and Timothy McGuire, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22–23 June 2015, 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 which 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 which took place in April 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. The school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers in science.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2014

■ Improve the quality of teaching, in order to accelerate progress and raise standards across the school, by ensuring that:
  – all teachers have high expectations of what all students, and particularly the most able, can achieve
  – teachers check regularly on students' progress and adapt their teaching as necessary to ensure that all students are challenged appropriately by the work they are set
  – marking and feedback are consistently helpful in moving students up to the next level of attainment
  – teachers check that students have acted on the guidance they are given through marking
  – all low-level disruptive behaviour is eliminated from lessons
  – teachers across all subjects develop students' literacy skills by regularly correcting any spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes.

■ Improve achievement in English and mathematics, particularly that of boys, students supported by the pupil premium and the most-able students, by:
  – providing more challenging work in all subjects for the most-able students
  – identifying early any students whose reading is weak and providing more frequent and effective support so that they can catch up with their peers
  – checking students' progress in writing more frequently, and providing more opportunities for students to develop their skills by writing at length in other subjects
  – giving greater attention in mathematics to the development of students' key skills in calculation and problem-solving
  – ensuring that disabled students and those who have special educational needs, who are not covered by the enhanced provision offered by the school, make the same good progress as those who are.

■ Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
  – making leaders', including subject leaders', evaluations of the school's and their own effectiveness more rigorous
  – reviewing the use of early entry for GCSE
  – providing better support for students whose main language is not English
  – raising expectations by making all students' targets more challenging throughout the school
  – ensuring that subject leaders' plans give greater emphasis to improving the progress made by different groups of students
  – ensuring that leaders check more frequently on the impact of the measures being taken to bring about improvement.

An external review of governance has taken place fairly recently, therefore a full external review of governance is not required. However, a 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 third monitoring inspection on 22–23 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work; scrutinised documents; and met the headteacher; members of the senior leadership team; the heads of English, mathematics, science and the lead practitioner for science; groups of students; the Chair of the Governing Body and a member of the governors' resources committee; and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the headteacher has appointed lead practitioners in English and science. A lead practitioner in mathematics is due to be appointed soon. A new science teacher took up their post at Easter. An additional data coordinator is supporting the administration and review of new data systems.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students continue to do better in their studies. Predictions based on the most recent assessments indicate that they will do much better at GCSE than last year's cohort. The school's data indicate the proportions of students due to make expected progress in English and mathematics have increased compared with last year. The rate of improvement in English continues to lag behind mathematics but is catching up.

The gap between the attainment of those students eligible for the pupil premium and their peers has narrowed substantially in both English and mathematics. This trend is also seen in Year 10, with the gap closing at a faster rate in this year group. The school's data for Key Stage 4 show that the gap in achievement between girls and boys is also closing. The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is improving at a similar rate to their peers.

The lead practitioner in English has introduced further opportunities to encourage and develop students' reading. There are weekly sessions when students read silently in tutor groups. The library is used more effectively so that lessons for whole classes are routinely held there in order to make better use of library books. The library is also the base for special events to boost enjoyment of reading, such as the live streaming of the Carnegie Award that took place during the monitoring visit. Teachers have a weekly literacy and numeracy focus in lessons. This is advertised in the staff bulletin and supported by helpful resources. A structured programme to develop students' reading skills further is due to start in September.

Students are carrying out problem solving more regularly in mathematics. This is helping them to make better progress.

The quality of teaching

Teachers are increasingly using data effectively to meet the particular learning needs of individual students and groups of students. Teachers make good use of learning strategy sheets to inform and regularly review their planning to ensure they provide students with an appropriate level of challenge or support. This level of planning enables teachers to demonstrate that they know their students well. Students respond very positively to this, and good relationships and rapport are forged in many lessons between teachers and their students.

Due to the training they have received, teachers have developed their use of questioning. There are examples of good practice across most subjects, where teachers use questions thoughtfully to extend students' learning, refine their responses and to promote the use of technical terminology and correct vocabulary. Students are growing in confidence as they become used to a greater level of challenge in lessons. Students are prepared to reflect on their answers and work out how to improve them, guided by their teacher. For example, in a mathematics lesson, a student was encouraged by his teacher to articulate his thoughts around the answer to a problem so that he was able to work out for himself the correction to be made. In a personal, social and health education lesson, students expressed their knowledge and views of different family structures sensitively and openly, guided by the carefully considered questions from their teachers and in a setting of mutual respect and safety that she has nurtured in the classroom.

The quality of the marking and feedback of students' work is continuing to develop. In the best examples, teachers provide helpful feedback that enables students to correct their work and make progress. For example, in mathematics, teachers provide helpful comments alongside an additional challenging task to which students respond productively during times given for this in lessons. Teachers use marking in books to improve grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, there remains much variation within and between subjects in the quality of marking. In some cases, large sections of work are unmarked and incorrect spellings, including of technical terms, are unchecked. Senior leaders and subject leaders are aware of these inconsistencies and are taking appropriate steps to improve the quality of marking and feedback through monitoring and opportunities to share good practice. They also recognise that expectations for the quality of students' responses to feedback need to be raised in some cases.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students generally respond promptly to their teachers' high expectations for behaviour and attentiveness. There are few examples of low-level disruption in lessons. The school's records show that incidents of poor behaviour are decreasing.

When students are distracted and their learning is interrupted, this tends to be due to chatting and off-task behaviour, and is associated with weaker teaching.

The new data system is used to improve the recording of students' behaviour, including incidents of poor behaviour and good behaviour. This enables leaders to monitor incidents involving individual students, groups and teachers so that appropriate support can be put in place accordingly. The recording system is in the early stages of enabling analysis of patterns of behaviour incidents but offers good potential to do so as its use continues to develop.

Students feel that some teachers do not deal with, or record, poor behaviour in the same way. The consistency of the use of the behaviour policy across the school needs to be reviewed.

Measures to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence are effective.

All safeguarding checks are in place and meet statutory requirements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders have provided appropriate training and so have ensured that new systems for recording and analysis of data about students' achievement are used routinely by teachers when they plan lessons. They have introduced the same rigour to the tracking of progress in Key Stage 3 so that meetings of pupil progress panels now take place for all year groups. Leaders are continuing to refine and develop these systems further, to include, for example, in the coming academic year, the tracking of interventions in Key Stage 3 and the facility for parents to access data about their child.

The quality of teaching continues to improve steadily. Leaders have recognised appropriately when monitoring systems have needed tightening to ensure that they provide a fully accurate picture and take into account a wider view to include students' progress, students' views and work scrutiny, as well as observations of lessons. Support packages and more rigorous appraisal have been effective in improving the quality of teaching. Inadequate teaching has reduced but has not been completely eliminated.

There is a raised profile of what leaders expect to see in lessons, such as greater challenge and the application of homework to support learning. These expectations are displayed in classrooms and some students refer to ways in which teachers use these strategies in their lessons. Teachers respond very positively to the opportunities for development and professional dialogue offered through the school's training programme. This is contributing to an increasingly collective drive towards improvement.

Leaders are effectively raising expectations about what students can achieve: both on the part of teachers' expectations and also of the students themselves. Students increasingly have challenging tasks and targets. There are also considerable efforts to raise students' aspirations, such as through displays highlighting past students as inspirational role models, visiting speakers and more extensive careers education. Students are encouraged to reflect regularly on their learning and to experience a sense of achievement by recognising their successes. For example, students record a range of achievements in inspiration diaries, such as when they are able to understand a concept that they have found difficult, or when they complete a piece of work of which they are proud.

Subject leaders have an accurate view of the key areas for improvement in their departments. The appointment of lead practitioners has strengthened leadership in English and science. Subject leaders have grown in confidence in holding members of their teams to account for the quality of their teaching. They recognise the importance of being out and about more in their departments to enable them to support and develop their teams, and are working closely with the senior leaders to enable them to do this. Subject leaders regularly share good practice and ideas, and value the opportunity to carry out work scrutiny together. They are aware of the need to tackle inconsistencies; for example, in the use of marking and feedback.

The governing body remains thoroughly committed to fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. While some developments and training have not taken place as immediately as governors had planned, the training that has taken place has been helpful and relevant. It is particularly beneficial when governors are able to apply their expertise in business to education. Governors are increasingly in a well-informed position to support and challenge the headteacher appropriately. They recognise the advantages of becoming more independent of the senior leaders for their training.

The governors, and particularly the Chair of the Governing Body, give a great deal of time and energy to supporting the improvement of the school. They demonstrate a continued understanding of the priorities for the school. They have supported the headteacher in taking the effective action needed to improve the quality of teaching. They are providing further practical support through mentoring of students and are about to formalise their individual links with subject areas.

External support

The school continues to receive good support from the local authority. A specialist leader of education continues to support the leadership of English. The school has regular contact with the local authority through its reviews. The local authority has recently awarded funding to the school to support accelerated performance.