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Vivien Sharples
Headteacher
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Swadlincote
Derbyshire
DE11 0QA

Dear Mrs Sharples

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Pingle School

Following my visit with Julie Griffiths and Isobel Randall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 20–21 May 2014, 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 May 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement 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 a maximum of three newly qualified teachers during the next academic year. These appointments can only be made if appropriate mentoring and strong professional support can be assured.

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, the Strategic Director of Children and Younger Adults for Derbyshire and to the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection, which took place in May 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that the majority is good and none is inadequate, by ensuring that:
 - lessons are properly planned to allow for the differing needs of students
 - techniques that help to deepen students' understanding, such as good questioning and the provision of opportunities for students to discuss and explore complex ideas, become much more widely used
 - much greater focus is placed on checking the progress that students are making
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of standards of behaviour and the presentation of students' work
 - teachers consistently apply the agreed strategies to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of students
 - teachers mark students' work regularly and provide helpful guidance for improvement, ensuring that students are given the time and support to respond to this advice and learn from it.

- Ensure that leaders, managers and governors provide very clear direction, support and accountability, particularly by:
 - including clear markers by which progress can be judged in the school development plan, and building in processes for effective monitoring, so that leaders and governors can properly evaluate success
 - including in the performance management of staff a clear statement of the performance objectives that each person must meet; providing guidance, training and support; and making regular checks to ensure that improvement is taking place
 - using advice from successful schools to enable leaders and managers to put in place effective systems for monitoring the work of the school more quickly
 - making sure that the governing body quickly establishes procedures to ensure that pupil premium funding benefits the students for whom it is intended and that teachers' pay is more closely linked to the quality of their teaching.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 20–21 May 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised documents and records. These included the school's attainment and progress information, governing body meeting minutes, safeguarding and complaints procedures, incident logs, monitoring and evaluation records, and reports of visits conducted by the school's improvement adviser and external consultants. Inspectors met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and a representative from the local authority. Meetings were held with three groups of students. Inspectors also spoke to individual teachers and students. They observed 25 lessons, including four in the sixth form. Around one-third of the lesson observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior team. Inspectors considered the progress being made in addressing the key recommendations that were identified in the previous inspection report, with the exception of those relating to the spending of the pupil premium and the management of teachers' performance, which were checked during the previous monitoring visit.

Context

A number of significant staffing changes have been made since the last monitoring visit. The acting headteacher has been appointed as the permanent headteacher. Staffing in the mathematics department has been strengthened with the appointment of two qualified and suitably experienced teachers, with two more teachers due to start in the autumn term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

School data and inspectors' own observations show that the progress that students make in lessons is greater than at the time of the last inspection. Students in the current Year 11 are expected to achieve better results than in 2013. The school's tracking system estimates that around 55% of students will gain 5A* to C grades including in English and mathematics, which is a significant increase on last year's results. However, the rate of improvement is not fast enough to make up for past underachievement or bring attainment up to national levels. While rates of progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 are improving, they are still too low in most subjects. Students have much more challenging targets, which are based on clear and widely shared expectations of what constitutes good progress across the school. The improved tracking system is extensively used by teachers to plan their lessons so that they are at the right level of difficulty, and to identify students in danger of falling behind. This information gives a clearer picture of students' progress across the school. The wider use of this information by class teachers is beginning to have a positive impact on raising the achievement of their students. However, it is still too soon to see the full impact of these changes on improved outcomes for all students.

In many lessons, demands are more challenging. Despite this, some students could make even faster progress, particularly the more able. Senior leaders recognise that the proportion of students who should be making better than expected progress in English and mathematics needs to be much higher than it was in 2013. Current tracking indicates a modest increase. Gaps remain between the attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals and the national average for this group, but these are closing. This is also the case for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

The school relies heavily on intervention and intensive support programmes in Year 11 to boost the examination results. This strategy makes it difficult to focus on and address the early signs of underachievement in the lower year groups. The school acknowledges this and has plans to address this issue.

In the sixth form, in-school data show that results are projected to rise this year to average at A level, and to above average at AS level. These expected improvements are largely due to the rationalisation of the entry policy and improvements in the tutorial arrangements.

The development of literacy across the school has been patchy, despite whole-staff training. Lesson observations show that strategies for developing literacy are not yet part of everyday practice in all subjects. Work scrutiny carried out by the school shows weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar that are not improving in some areas. The new corrective reading programme for students in Year 7 is having a positive impact on reading ages. However, these improved reading skills are not fully utilised across the school in order to accelerate achievement in each subject. In most subjects, work on literacy is mainly confined to the use of key words.

The quality of teaching

Comprehensive professional development and new appointments are resulting in a steadily improving profile of teaching quality across the school. Good teaching is more prevalent and some teaching is outstanding. However, very small pockets of inadequate teaching remain. Most teachers have responded well to the support they have received to improve their teaching.

Where teaching is at its best, it is typified by high expectations for students' attainment and productivity. Activities are well matched to the capabilities of different students and approaches successfully interest and motivate students to learn well and at a fast pace. Teachers also use questioning to check students' understanding carefully and encourage them to work on complex issues and think things out for themselves. Teachers check the progress of their students regularly in class and adapt their work accordingly. In the less effective lessons, teachers expect too little of students, and fail to capture their interest or engage them in their work.

As a result, students make slower progress and become distracted and resistant to learning.

The presentation of work in books is too variable. Work is not always set out neatly and some work is untidy. Some teachers do not pay enough attention to ensuring high quality of presentation in books. The quality of marking has improved. Many students receive good advice, which is thoroughly followed up. Where there are weaknesses in teachers' use of marking, students are not expected to make necessary improvements to their work so that they learn from the advice they are given.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school continues to improve. There has been a focus on improving students' attitudes to learning, running in parallel with efforts to improve the quality of teaching. This is being achieved through assemblies, tutorial work, classroom observations, and staff training, with personalised support to teachers where necessary. Students say that they are aware of the school's raised expectations of behaviour and that poor behaviour will have clear consequences. The number of sanctions having to be applied for poor behaviour is declining and the number of positive behaviour points is increasing. This is an indication of better student attitudes to learning. However, for some students, disruptions to learning which slow their progress are still too frequent; for example, when students shout out or do not display positive attitudes to learning. In part, this is because not all teachers have consistently high expectations for students' behaviour or they do not successfully apply the school's behaviour policy.

Students say they feel safe in school. They have been prepared well to understand and confront any forms of bullying which may occur. Students report that, when bullying occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Scrutiny of school's case studies and behaviour logs supports this view.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and the interim executive board have spent much time and effort getting systems in place and the right people in situ for lasting improvement. School leaders make regular and accurate evaluations of the quality of provision in the school. An effective plan is in place to address the identified weaknesses. Clear milestones have been set so that progress can be easily measured each term. Measures of success have been defined for all staff to follow, which have been incorporated into the system that manages and rewards their performance. The senior team and the team of middle leaders have been strengthened with new staffing appointments. There are fewer temporary and supply staff than previously. Teaching continues to improve as the 'non-negotiables' set by senior leaders become part of everyday practice. As a result, modest improvements have been seen in the

achievement of students at Key Stage 4, and more so at Key Stage 3. Staff are fully behind the school improvement agenda set by the headteacher and interim executive board, and are working hard to achieve the very best for their students. School leaders and staff acknowledge that there is still more to be done and that the pace of change needs to accelerate further in order to bring the achievement of all students to acceptable levels.

Leaders know how well students, and different groups of students, are achieving in each year group, and this means that teachers can provide additional support when this is needed. This support is mainly targeted at students in Year 11. Overall, leaders need to be sharper in their analysis of the achievement data that they have available to them for all students at Key Stage 3. This will mean that any trends can quickly be spotted and dealt with at an early stage so that less intervention work is required at Key Stage 4.

Weaknesses in teaching and learning are identified and a range of appropriate actions is taken to address shortcomings in practice. Training to improve teachers' skills is targeted at those who need it. For example, those teachers who require improvement to be good receive tailored training and support in the classroom. Teachers whose practice is good are identified, then are suitably supported and guided to improve their teaching further, utilising in-house and external expertise. Evidence shows that this strategy is working, as the overall quality of teaching is improving.

Positive relationships have now become established with two successful schools. Advice and guidance are regularly sought from these schools, and there are sure signs of genuine and productive partnership working that is much valued.

The interim executive board has high aspirations for the school. At its regular meetings, it provides a strong level of challenge to the school's leaders. While holding the school's longer-term direction in view, members maintain a sharp focus on the school's priorities and are clear about the information the school should provide to demonstrate the progress being made. Members are regular visitors to the school and make regular checks to see how well the school is doing. The interim executive board is not afraid to make difficult decisions and take appropriate action to secure the future success of the school. The procedures for safeguarding pupils were checked and found to meet the government's current requirements.

The Pingle School has a reputation as a caring and inclusive school. It is now rightly placing a greater emphasis on students' learning and achievement while holding onto these core values. It recognises that the main driver for these changes is concerted action to improve the quality of teaching, together with the effective implementation of its behaviour policy.

External support

School leaders are drawing on a wide range of external support to improve teaching and school leadership. The local authority remains strongly committed to supporting the school's improvement. It has continued to provide consultant support in English, mathematics and science in order to improve teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment practice. An external consultant has helped the school to improve its behaviour management practices, and an external review of the sixth form has been arranged for this term. The local authority continues to provide regular reviews to check on the school's progress and to provide useful advice and guidance on the next steps to improvement.