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Mr Michael Taylor
Headteacher
The Hawthorne's Free School
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Merseyside
L20 6AQ

Dear Mr Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Hawthorne's Free School

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 March 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 February 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.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Department for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Sefton.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in all subjects, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - making sure the most able students are challenged in every lesson, make at least expected progress and achieve the highest grades
 - maximising opportunities to correct and extend literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.

- Make effective use of the pupil premium funding so that students who are known to be eligible for support make at least expected progress and the gap in attainment between them and others narrows. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how the deployment of the funding may be improved.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - making sure data are clear and accurate to enable leaders at all levels, governors and teachers to use them effectively to raise standards, accurately track students' progress and challenge performance
 - making sure leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching are based upon students' progress data and learning within lessons, so that there is an accurate view of the school's performance
 - ensuring the leadership of mathematics improves the quality of teaching and improves students' mathematical knowledge and skills.

- Raise students' attendance, including that of students who are supported by the pupil premium, by:
 - providing positive rewards and encouragement for good attendance and punctuality
 - reinforcing with students and their parents the importance of coming to school on time and the consequences of poor attendance.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24 to 25 March 2015

Evidence

I considered a wide range of evidence during my visit and observed the school's work in order to arrive at a judgement of the progress you and your colleagues are making as you steer the school on its journey out of special measures and onward to a good overall effectiveness. I observed teaching in a number of subjects. Three of these lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. I also visited a morning registration session, one Year 11 assembly and observed the students during one morning break.

I held meetings with you and the Executive Principal and met separately with the senior leaders responsible for behaviour and attendance, students' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, middle leaders responsible for the English Baccalaureate subjects, a group of class teachers and a group of eight Year 11 students.

I scrutinised the work in a sample of students' books. This enabled me to evaluate the quality of marking and the progress students are making in a range of subjects. I examined senior leaders' evaluation of how the school is doing, the school development plan and the school's most up-to-date data on students' attendance, attainment and progress. I also examined senior leaders' records of the monitoring of students' progress and the quality of teaching.

I was unable to take into account parents' views as there were too few responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire, Parent View.

Context

Since my previous visit the deputy headteacher has left the school and a new governing body has been constituted.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since my previous visit the national GCSE examination data for 2014 have been published by the Department for Education. When compared to national figures the proportion of Year 11 students who left The Hawthorne's last year with five higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics was significantly below average. However, when the GCSE subjects of English and mathematics are considered separately, students' attainment in mathematics was significantly below average for the proportion of students who achieved at least a C grade in this subject, but significantly above average on this measure in English Language. Further, the attainment of students in the large majority subjects was broadly in line with national averages. However, although these latter outcomes are encouraging, when

the data are examined by groups, it is the attainment of the girls that made an important contribution to these results. Their attainment was much better than that of the boys in all the English Baccalaureate subject areas. Further, boys' attainment was significantly below average in English and mathematics. In addition, when the attainment of disadvantaged students is compared to that of their classmates the gap in attainment was wider than that found nationally, in 2014.

Nevertheless, the analysis of students' progress from the end of Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 reveals some encouraging trends. In modern languages, for example, three quarters of the Year 11 cohort, last year, were entered for either French or Spanish at GCSE and when compared to their peers across the country their progress was significantly above average. When the cohort is considered as a whole, students' progress in mathematics was broadly in line with the national average as it was for the minority of students who were entered for two science GCSE subjects. However, when students' progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 is analysed by groups, it is the progress of the girls that made a significant contribution to the school's overall figures. For example, in English and mathematics girls' progress in 2014 was substantially above that of the boys and in particular middle ability boys. Further, the gap in progress between disadvantaged students and their classmates in English and mathematics also widened in 2014 when compared to the previous year.

The school's most recent assessment data indicate that in current Year 11 the proportion of students attaining at the level of five higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics is about five percentage points higher than the figure for last year. In addition, gaps in attainment between the boys and girls, disadvantaged students and their classmates and students with special educational needs and other students in the school are closing. The attainment of all groups is an improvement on their performance in 2014. Further, the school reports that students' progress from their various starting points, in English and mathematics is on an improving trend.

The quality of teaching

Evidence from observations of teachers' classroom practice and the work in students' books reveals that inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching. Where classroom practice is strongest students make rapid and sustained progress. Teachers set students challenging work, which makes them think. Teachers use skilful questioning to make demands on students' understanding, enabling students to see how different aspects of the subject link together. Teachers plan activities that capture students' interests, enabling them to take responsibility for their learning. Teachers give students opportunities to develop their ideas and demonstrate their grasp of them in extended pieces of writing. Work of this standard is evident in English and Spanish. However, not all teaching is of this quality. There is evidence that some teachers still adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to lesson planning. As a result, all students are given the same work to do, which can be too

easy for the most able students in the group and too hard for those who find the subject challenging. As a result, the progress of both groups slows. There are also examples of teachers who stick rigidly to their lesson plan, not adapting it and moving on when the students have 'got it'; consequently failing to capitalise on students' emerging understanding and moving their learning on to maximise their progress.

As at my previous visit, the quality of teachers' marking and its impact on students' progress is inconsistent. In all the books that I scrutinised, it is evident that teachers regularly review students' work. In the best examples, teachers point out to students what they have done well and what they need to do to improve the work to make it even better. In addition, the introduction of the 'stretch' question is enabling some teachers to challenge their students, test their understanding and further their learning. However, not all marking is of this standard. In some books, students have not acted on their teachers' advice to improve the work and this has not been followed up by the teacher. Consequently, opportunities for marking to have a positive impact on students' learning are being missed. In other books, the stretch question lacks challenge, merely reinforcing earlier learning and not extending it. Further, when the stretch question is suitably challenging the teacher accepts a superficial answer and an opportunity for the student to write an extended answer, drawing on their wider knowledge and understanding, is missed.

In the science books I examined, students are doing appropriate work for their age and the course of study they are following. However, there is little evidence that students are involved in carrying out practical work in order to develop their scientific practical skills and then use them to carry out scientific investigations.

Senior leaders are taking effective action to address fundamental weaknesses in students' basic mathematical understanding. For example, students regularly work on fundamental numeracy skills, for example, their times-tables during form period. In Year 11, some form groups have been reorganised so that they have a maths specialist as a form tutor. This is enabling these final year students to have additional tuition in this core subject.

In the mathematics books I scrutinised, the work students are doing is age appropriate and consistent with examination board requirements. However, as was the case at my last visit, there is an over emphasis on the mastery of mathematical techniques and too few opportunities for students to test their understanding or use their reasoning skills to solve problems.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students conduct themselves well around the school. Relationships between students and their peers and students and their teachers are cordial and characterised by mutual respect. This results in a calm and purposeful atmosphere

around the school which is conducive to learning. Students' uniform standards are high and they wear their uniform with pride. As one student said, 'we like our uniform and want to look smart'. Students value their school environment and look after it well. This is reflected in a site that is clean, tidy, litter and graffiti free.

Senior leaders' work to improve attendance continues to bear fruit. Two members of staff have responsibility for monitoring students' attendance and following up any absences, including contacting parents electronically should their child fail to register. Students whose record of attendance gives cause for concern are carefully monitored by school staff. The latter involve parents at an early stage with the expressed aim of identifying the causes for students' continued absence and putting in place appropriate strategies to ensure these students come into school. Students who achieve 100% attendance are entered in a weekly prize draw, as a reward for coming to school every day. Taken together, these initiatives have resulted in the school reporting an improvement in attendance, particularly in Year 11, compared to last year with a concurrent fall in the proportion of students who are persistently absent.

Senior leaders have clarified with students and their parents the school's expectations for the time students should arrive at school in the mornings. Students who are late for school have to explain the reason for their tardiness to a senior member of staff and 'pay-back' the lost time on the same day, at the end of school. This strategy has had a positive impact on students' punctuality with the school reporting a substantial reduction in the numbers of students who are late in the mornings.

Those students that I spoke with during my visit unanimously agreed that behaviour in school and particularly in lessons is improving. They attribute this improvement to the new tiered consequence system which is used consistently by all teachers and understood by students. As a result, students say that there has been a reduction in the number of occasions, in lessons, when their learning is disturbed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since my previous visit you have restructured the middle leadership team. Middle leaders' responsibilities have been clarified as have lines of accountability. Consequently, middle leaders know what senior leaders' expectations of them are in relation to improving the school. The new structure places much greater emphasis on students' academic performance than was the case in the past. This emphasis is reflected in the fortnightly meetings that each middle leader has with their line manager. During these meetings middle leaders are held to account for students' progress and the impact that teaching is having on students' learning.

Middle leaders have been given greater responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas. Along with senior leaders they use a

range of evidence including observing their colleagues' classroom practice, the work in students' books, data on students' performance and student voice to determine the quality of provision. This enables them to affirm colleagues' good practice and target appropriate support for those colleagues whose practice falls below the school's high expectations.

In your drive to improve the quality of teaching, you have identified those teachers whose practice is consistently strong and paired them with those practitioners who require support to improve the quality of their teaching. The intention of these professional pairings is that teachers will learn from each other about what works best in the classroom. However, this is a relatively new development and it is too early to assess its impact.

Senior leaders have introduced much greater rigour to the monitoring of students' progress. At the end of each learning cycle students are given a formal assessment. The data from these formal assessments are then collected, analysed and used to determine students' performance in all their subjects. To address issues with the reliability of teachers' assessments in the past, senior leaders have enlisted the support of subject specialists from a number of other schools in order to assure the data. Consequently, you and the governors have confidence in the information that you are receiving about students' achievement and have a firm foundation upon which to hold teachers to account for students' outcomes. However, there is evidence from the notes of meetings held to discuss students' performance that the reasons given by some teachers to account for an individual learner's underachievement are not sharp enough. As a result, some teachers do not make clear what extra help students need, to improve their knowledge and understanding, in order to accelerate their progress.

Senior leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing is accurate and used to inform the priorities in the school development plan. The latter is a detailed document, which plots the school's journey of improvement and identifies the individuals responsible for each aspect. However, the mechanisms for monitoring the plan and evaluating the effectiveness of the actions being taken to improve the school are not specified. Consequently, it is not clear how the progress of the plan will be monitored or who will be held to account for its impact.

Since my previous visit a new governing body has been constituted. The new Chair of the Governing Body is ambitious for the school and has high expectations for both students' and teachers' performance. However, it is relatively early days in the life of this governing body and the Chair accepts that governors will require training and development in order to maximise their impact on the strategic direction of the school.

External support

The Hawthorne's link with a successful free school in a neighbouring authority has continued to strengthen since my previous visit. Reciprocal visits between the staff of the two schools have taken place to share good practice in relation to leadership, management and quality of teaching. A senior leader from the other school is spending time working with The Hawthorne's staff to establish the system for monitoring students' progress and bring much greater rigour to this aspect of leadership and management.

Subject specialists from a number of other schools have worked with middle leaders to help them quality assure teachers' assessments of their students' performance.

Senior leaders brokered the support of an external consultant to review the school's use of the pupil premium. This has led to a much sharper focus on how this funding is used and the impact it is having on disadvantaged students' outcomes.