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Mr William Leyland
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Leyland

Special measures monitoring inspection of Kirkby High School

Following my visit with Helen Gaunt, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 12–13 September 2017, 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 academy'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 2017.

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 local trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Mackenzie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017.

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to urgently enhance outcomes for all groups of pupils across all subjects, especially for disadvantaged pupils, boys and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have the skills to assess pupils' progress accurately
 - ensuring that teachers use accurate assessment information to plan lessons to suit the needs of all pupils
 - making sure that teachers have high expectations of what all pupils should achieve for their age and from their respective starting points
 - ensuring that teachers' questioning is used to challenge and stretch the thinking of the most able pupils
 - developing and implementing a policy which is followed by all teachers to improve pupils' literacy skills.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - raising attendance for all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - ensuring the consistent application of the school's behaviour policy to reduce disruption in lessons
 - continuing to reduce the rates of exclusion.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all leaders rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes so that they have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
 - sharpening school development planning so that it is more effective in driving improvement
 - developing the skills of leaders of different subjects and groups so that they are able to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that leaders use the pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding more effectively to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and younger pupils who have fallen behind
 - ensuring that the sponsor and governors rigorously hold all leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

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 first monitoring inspection on 12 September 2017 to 13 September 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, the trust's chief executive officer, the trust's head of school improvement, the executive headteacher, members of the school's senior leadership team, three members of the governing body and groups of teachers including subject leaders. Inspectors visited classrooms to observe pupils learning and spoke to pupils during their break and lunchtimes.

Context

Since the last inspection, the trust has provided considerable support for leadership at the academy. A new deputy headteacher responsible for the quality of teaching and learning took up post on 1 September 2017. There has been a large turnover of teaching staff. The school continues to be part of the Rowan Learning Trust.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

- It is commendable that you, leaders and teachers recognise that the standard of education that was being provided by the school was not good enough. Collectively, staff are in a positive frame of mind to improve the quality of their work. They want to do better for the children of the Kirkby community.
- With the support of the trust, you have reorganised the roles of the deputy headteachers and made a key appointment to the role of deputy headteacher with responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- You and the trust have also developed and introduced systems and procedures intended to promote improved behaviour, enable sharper analysis of the quality and impact of the work of all staff and improved the clarity about who is accountable for different aspects of school improvement.
- You and the trust say that these changes ought to have been made after the school's inspection in June of 2015, which would have promoted school improvement sooner, benefiting more pupils. Some impact of the very recent improvements can be seen. However, these changes are not yet making a significant difference to teaching and the outcomes for pupils.
- Planning for school improvement at a strategic level is much better than it was. Published plans are realistic and actions appear to be timely. Criteria on which you can measure success are clear and, as often as possible, based on outcomes for pupils. However, it is not clear who is accountable for outcomes.
- Staff have welcomed better planning for school improvement. They say that expectations of them are high, but appreciate the new clarity they have about

their roles. Staff are beginning to feel accountable for their responsibilities. Where appropriate, you have ensured that staff have received suitable training and coaching. Again, it is too early to evaluate fully the impact of these developments.

- Procedures to ease the transition of pupils from their primary schools to Kirkby High have been developing for four years. Primary schools can use specialist staff and facilities provided by Kirkby High to add to their curriculum. Pastoral information is passed from pupils' primary schools efficiently. Pupils new to the school are also well informed about what is expected of them and about the values of the high school. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who struggle to behave well are particularly well served by these transitional arrangements. However, teachers of Year 7 pupils are not given enough detailed information to enable them to build on what pupils have already learned. Consequently, too much time is wasted in Year 7.
- The development of the trust's system for describing the key stage 3 curriculum and how to assess pupils' progress is providing a great deal of support to teachers. Much good work has been done to help teachers assess the quality of pupils' work more accurately. They are now better placed to assess how well pupils are progressing.
- The school's system to monitor the progress of pupils in both key stage 3 and key stage 4 has been improved considerably. Senior leaders and subject leaders can now analyse the progress of individual pupils, classes and groups of pupils throughout the year. However, staff are not yet sufficiently skilled in using this system to evaluate the impact of different aspects of the school's work. For example, the school invests heavily in additional support for pupils who are significantly underachieving but leaders do not know if this support is effective.
- Senior leaders have been too generous in their evaluations of how good teaching was because they did not pay enough attention to how well pupils were learning. Systems to evaluate the quality of teaching are becoming more accurate. The system to manage teachers' performance now holds teachers more rigorously to account for the progress that their pupils make. Leaders are beginning to address underperformance of leaders and teachers more quickly.
- Although there have been some developments intended to improve pupils' literacy, not enough is being done to make improvements rapid and significant.
- Engagement with parents of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who struggle to behave well is good.
- An external review of governance was undertaken in July 2017 to assess how this aspect of leadership and management could be improved. Governors found the review and the associated action plan very valuable. The governing body has started to restructure and members are much clearer about their role in improving outcomes for pupils by robustly holding the school's leadership to account.
- An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium was undertaken in

July 2017 to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. The subsequent report was of high quality because it was unequivocal in evaluating how well this additional funding was being spent and listed precisely what the school needs to do to improve this aspect of education. You have ensured that a plan has been drawn up to make these improvements.

- After the last inspection, about four months passed before these reviews took place. Consequently, any required changes were not in place by the start of this new academic year.
- Overall, you have overseen considerable structural and procedural change. Staff morale is high. However, there is little evidence yet of the impact these developments are making on the outcomes for pupils currently in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

- There are undoubtedly some strong teachers in Kirkby High. The quality of pupils' work in art is impressive. Pupils enjoy and excel in drama. Generally teaching is very effective in English. However, most teachers are still not expecting enough of their pupils, so rates of progress are not good enough for all groups of pupils.
- Too few teachers are confident about assessing how well pupils are learning during a lesson and moving things on quickly for those pupils who understand. Similarly, teachers are not using pupils' prior learning to plan lessons. These weaknesses often lead to lessons that only meet the needs of a small proportion of pupils, usually the least able.
- Pupils say that they enjoy lessons where they 'do stuff' rather than listen to teachers for long periods. In classrooms, most pupils behave well. On the odd occasion when their attention wanders, pupils respond quickly to teachers asking them to refocus on their work. However, teaching generally and the activities that pupils undertake do not capture pupils' attention. In many lessons, pupils do not find learning interesting or engaging.
- Despite teachers now accepting that the active promotion of literacy is everyone's responsibility, too few teachers understand how to improve pupils' levels of literacy. Teachers now try to ensure that pupils answer questions in full sentences. However, pupils are not being given questions that require them to think deeply. Pupils are not being given sufficient time to formulate their opinions or ideas, nor are pupils given opportunities to explain their thinking. This is undermining pupils' confidence in expressing themselves.
- When teaching is effective, pupils are keen to get to lessons, engage enthusiastically and value the time spent with these teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

- You introduced a new policy for behaviour at the beginning of this academic year, which was the week before our visit. Teachers say that this will help them to ensure that expectations of pupils are consistent across the school. It was evident from our visits to classrooms that teachers were following the policy.

Pupils gave us mixed messages about the new behaviour policy, but pupils want behaviour to be good so that they can learn.

- The new behaviour policy details a hierarchy of punishments to discourage poor behaviour and rewards good behaviour. Pupils are more likely to be withdrawn from lessons to a different part of the school and given appropriate learning than being excluded. In this way, you are ensuring that these pupils continue to learn. Levels of exclusion are reducing.
- We observed almost all pupils conducting themselves well during the school day. At lesson changeover, pupils moved efficiently and safely to their next class without the need for prompting by staff. As at the last inspection, pupils said that bullying is not a serious concern for them. When it happens, they are very confident that bullying will be addressed effectively and quickly. We observed that pupils wore their uniform well and they were as smart at the end of the day as they were at the start. We also noted that staff appeared to be reluctant to challenge pupils who deliberately left litter or who did not clear their food waste.
- Inspectors at the last inspection identified attendance as an area for improvement. Since then, attendance has deteriorated. Leaders understand that pupil absence will have a significantly negative impact on pupil achievement. However, they have not taken effective steps to address this, including significantly improving the quality of teaching.
- Leaders are unable to evaluate the impact of different systems to encourage good behaviour because they are not sufficiently skilled in gathering and analysing information. They are therefore unable to evaluate the impact of their work or identify specifically what needs to be improved.

Outcomes for pupils

- National changes to GCSE examinations in 2017 mean that the unvalidated Year 11 results cannot be compared directly to the previous outcomes at the end of key stage 4. However, the school's own analysis of the 2017 GCSE results suggests an improvement. The school's information suggests that, on average, pupils attained one grade better in each subject than pupils gained in 2016. If this is borne out by analysis published by the Department for Education, it would represent a very encouraging improvement. Of particular note is the apparent considerable improvement of low-ability pupils. While this is a cause for celebration, it does mask the lack of improvement for middle- and high-ability pupils. If this is indeed the case, it adds to the evidence that teachers are not sufficiently challenging all groups of pupils.
- The school's analysis also suggests that large disparities are not diminishing between disadvantaged pupils and others, and between boys and girls.
- The school's new system to monitor pupil progress indicates that by the end of Year 7, pupils are already underachieving. There are no year groups where pupils appear to be making the progress expected of them.

External support

- Your engagement with external support has been limited because the internal support provided by the trust, since the last inspection, has been considerable and of good quality.
- Visits to other schools and consultation with an expert in behaviour management have been effective in focusing teachers' attention on how to improve behaviour and the timely introduction of the school's new behaviour policy.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teachers' skills in:
 - planning lessons which pupils find interesting and engaging
 - challenging all pupils to think deeply about their ideas and opinions
 - developing pupils' abilities to express themselves with confidence
 - providing the right level of work for all groups of pupils in lessons, particularly the most able.