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Mrs Angela Smith
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Dear Mrs Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ferrers School

Following my visit with Laurence Reilly, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 5 to 6 December 2018, 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 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 May 2018.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school 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 Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2018.

- Urgently address the serious weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements by:
 - ensuring that all leaders responsible for safeguarding, including governors, know, understand and carry out their duties in line with statutory guidance
 - keeping accurate and rigorous safeguarding files, which are updated in a timely manner.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all subject leaders monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning within their subjects, particularly in English and mathematics
 - ensuring that leaders use additional funding effectively, including that for disadvantaged pupils, for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and the Year 7 catch-up funding, to raise the achievement of eligible pupils
 - strengthening the role of governors, so that school leaders are effectively held to account and supported.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and its impact on pupils' progress by:
 - using information about pupils' abilities and needs to plan learning that sufficiently challenges the most able pupils and provides focused support for the least able, so that they all make good progress
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive better support, so that they can catch up with other pupils
 - applying consistently the school's assessment and feedback policy, so pupils know what they need to do to improve
 - using effective questioning that challenges pupils' misconceptions and moves them on to the next stage of their learning.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that leaders and staff deal promptly and effectively with all incidents of bullying, so that their occurrence is minimised and pupils are encouraged to have respect for each other
 - supporting all pupils to become self-confident and resilient learners
 - eradicating low-level disruption in class, so that all pupils can make at least good progress
 - further reducing absence, persistent absence and exclusions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

- Improve provision in the sixth form by monitoring students' attendance more rigorously and ensuring that all students attend well.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 5 December 2018 to 6 December 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the head of sixth form and the chair of the governing body. Inspectors held discussions with three groups of pupils and spoke with pupils during lessons and social time. They also met with a group of teachers. Inspectors observed teaching in a wide range of subjects at key stages 3 and 4, making short visits to 22 lessons. Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation, including information on the school's website and the external review of governance. They scrutinised records of pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance as well as records relating to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A telephone conversation was held with a leader at the school's major alternative provider, the Rushmere Academy. Inspectors also scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures and records.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in senior leadership at the school. Two senior leaders previously in post have left the school. The headteacher has appointed a new deputy headteacher and three new curriculum leaders, in design technology, physical education and modern foreign languages. A new leader in charge of post-16 provision was also appointed in September 2018. One member of staff, the school's special educational needs coordinator, is on maternity leave. The duties relating to this role, as well as oversight of the pupil premium funding, have been picked up by the headteacher. Senior roles and responsibilities have been reorganised and are clearly defined, including the designated leader for safeguarding. The senior leadership team is currently smaller than was previously the case and comprises the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, an assistant headteacher and a chief financial officer.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school's senior leadership is now in a stable position. The headteacher and other senior leaders present a unified team. They have brought about a renewed energy and determination to rapidly improve standards at the school and, consequently, the pace of improvement is accelerating. The headteacher wasted no time in drawing up and implementing an effective action plan for improvement. Leaders have rightly prioritised the safeguarding of pupils, pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching. Leaders are fostering a shared culture of belief and cooperation, underpinned by high expectations. The senior team has a visible presence in the school and staff say that they feel better supported. Staff morale is positive.

Leaders are realistic that they are on a journey of school improvement and

understand that not everything can be improved immediately. They know the school well and have accurately evaluated its current strengths and areas which require further support and development. The whole-school plan is comprehensive and addresses all of the improvement priorities identified in the last inspection. The progress of key actions against this plan is reviewed regularly, alongside governors. This is also evident in subject improvement planning which is closely aligned with the whole-school vision. However, while the actions are clear in subject planning the measurable criteria by which to evaluate the success, or otherwise, of leaders' actions are not consistent.

Following the section 5 inspection, leaders took swift action to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils. Specific attention was paid to ensuring the security of the school site and premises. The checks made on the recruitment of staff are secure and monitored by senior leaders and governors. Procedures are in place to ensure that all visitors are suitably checked. The new designated safeguarding leader, supported by an effective team, has comprehensively reviewed and overhauled the school's procedures for recording concerns and follow-up referrals. These arrangements are now timely and effective. All staff know and understand the school's safeguarding arrangements, and opportunities for staff training have been enhanced. Leaders are working effectively with outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the right support when it is needed. Pupils say that they know who they can talk to if they have any worries or concerns and told inspectors that they felt safe in school.

Senior leaders are working more closely with curriculum leaders to monitor and reliably evaluate the quality of the school's provision. Senior leaders have put into place more stringent line management and quality assurance processes to hold curriculum leaders and teaching staff to account for pupils' achievement. There remain, however, variations in the effectiveness of curriculum leaders in driving the improvements required, particularly in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The leadership of English and expressive arts is strong.

The oversight of the funding for pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is strengthening. Leaders have a clear understanding of the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils and the range of strategies the school employs in helping pupils to overcome them. Recently a new 'student support adviser' was recruited to provide closer support for disadvantaged pupils, including strengthening the school's engagement with parents, tutorials and in providing a morning 'breakfast club', for example. There are encouraging signs that this role is having a positive impact on pupils' attendance and behaviour. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is improving. However, the recent 'Ferrers Four' strategy, designed specifically to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils in the classroom, is inconsistently applied by staff.

The additional government funding that the school receives to help pupils in Year 7 catch up with their peers if they are behind in English or mathematics has been spent well on a variety of strategies. There have been improvements in pupils'

literacy and numeracy skills as a result, particularly in reading. The leadership of pupils with SEND is beginning to strengthen. Pupils benefit from closer support in the learning support base, as well as in the classroom. As a result, these pupils are beginning to make more progress than was the case in previous years.

Following the last inspection, leaders immediately commissioned a review of the effectiveness of governance. Governors engaged positively with this process and, consequently, governance is strengthening rapidly. They now have a clearer understanding of their strategic role and the importance of holding senior leaders to account. Their questioning of senior leaders' actions is constructive and interrogative, facilitated by high-quality information provided by the headteacher. Furthermore, governors have established formal links with faculty leaders across the school to support their evaluation of the school's provision.

Despite the challenges that the school faces, and some ongoing difficulties, leaders' actions have instilled a sense of optimism about the future of the school. Staff who spoke with inspectors say that the culture and ethos of the school have become more positive.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Senior leaders have started work to improve the consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have revised the school's expectations for teachers' planning and for providing pupils with feedback. These are referred to as the 'non-negotiables'. They have put into place a range of professional development opportunities which enable teachers to plan learning which challenges pupils, appropriate to their needs and abilities. Consequently, the quality of teaching is beginning to improve.

A development group of staff has worked on sharing effective classroom practice in support of these expectations. However, the extent to which all staff have applied the professional learning in their practice is variable, within and between different subjects. Teachers have good subject knowledge but do not use it consistently well enough to inspire and enthuse pupils in their learning. The quality of teachers' questioning of what pupils know or can do is also variable. Sometimes teachers move the learning on too quickly before checking that all pupils have understood.

Inspectors found clear evidence of disparities in the quality and presentation of pupils' work depending upon which class they are in. This was the case in science and mathematics, for example. In these subjects, teachers' expectations are uneven and the school's policy on marking and feedback is not consistently applied. Pupils say that their enjoyment of learning differs, depending on which teacher they have.

In contrast, inspectors found that in other subjects a consistent combination of high expectations, teacher enthusiasm, appropriately challenging work and the full application of the school's policy on using feedback are enabling pupils to demonstrate faster progress. In a Year 11 dance lesson, for example, pupils were

committed to improving the quality of their performances because of the high expectations of their teacher and their depth of understanding about successful performance criteria. Similarly, in a Year 7 English lesson about 19th century crime literature the teacher ensured that pupils knew how to be successful in their independent writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school's recently revised behaviour policy is leading to improvements in pupils' behaviour. The new policy has a stronger focus on recognising positive behaviour and achievement, and challenges poor behaviour. A strong visible presence of leaders and the implementation of a 'behaviour and inclusion' room have helped to significantly reduce the number of disturbances during lesson and social time. The proportion of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions has decreased rapidly since the previous inspection. Inspectors noticed that, on the whole, relationships between staff and pupils are positive. In lessons, pupils tend to be quiet and compliant overall. When the teaching is not sufficiently engaging or challenging, however, pupils' concentration wanes and some low-level disruption results. Pupils who spoke with inspectors say that behaviour at the school has improved overall; however, they also say that lessons are still disrupted by some pupils in some subjects.

Leaders have applied a range of decisive actions to improve the attendance of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. These include stronger engagement with parents through the appointment of a new student support adviser and the effective deployment of an education welfare officer. As a result, pupils' overall attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has been high in the past, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, but this has also decreased rapidly. Leaders have ensured that pupils receiving their education away from the school site attend and behave well. The overall attendance of students in the sixth form has improved since the previous inspection. New procedures and systems have been introduced to ensure that leaders monitor when students are in attendance, and effective actions are taken to challenge poor attendance, in line with the main school. Leaders continue to work on further developing and sustaining recent improvements in the attendance of pupils and they recognise the importance of this issue.

The general conduct of pupils throughout the school day is calm and orderly. Pupils wear their uniform smartly. Areas of the school are well supervised during social time and pupils were observed using social and dining spaces respectfully. Pupils are typically punctual to lessons. However, the number of pupils arriving late to school in the morning remains high and, despite leaders' actions to address the issue, requires further attention. At the time of the previous inspection, pupils reported that incidences of bullying were not dealt with effectively by staff. Leaders have taken determined action to improve this position. School records indicate that the number of reported incidents of bullying is low and pupils agreed. Pupils say that they are now more confident that issues related to bullying would be sorted out effectively by staff. Pupil 'anti-bullying ambassadors' have been recruited by leaders

to further support this aspect of the school's work, although this development is in its infancy.

The previous inspection report called for leaders to support pupils in becoming self-confident and resilient learners. Pupils benefit from a well-planned programme of personal, social, health and economic development. Through the 'learning for life' curriculum, leaders have focused on improving pupils' understanding of how to keep safe, of anti-bullying strategies, mental health and well-being, and healthy relationships. Leaders have also paid specific attention to enhancing the school's provision for careers advice and guidance. The 'raising aspiration programme', for example, provides a wide range of opportunities which help to develop pupils' personal goals and employability skills. The programme is used across all year groups with projects such as 'Wise up' and the 'Brilliant club'.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2018, the overall progress made by pupils in Year 11 improved across the majority of subjects, including English and mathematics. The performance of the most able pupils also improved. While pupils' progress in their best eight subjects overall was below average compared to other pupils nationally, it was markedly better than in the previous year. In modern foreign languages pupils made rapid progress. However, in humanities pupils made less progress than in the previous year. The progress made by boys has improved, although this continues to be lower than the progress made by girls. Results at A level were less strong in 2018 compared to 2017.

The progress of pupils with SEND in 2018 marked a big improvement compared to 2017, especially in English and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils made better progress than in 2017. While disadvantaged pupils continued to attain significantly less well than other pupils nationally, clear improvements were evident in 2018. An effective programme of support and additional teaching helped to secure the improved progress for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in English.

Pupils' class work and leaders' internal tracking information indicate that the attainment and progress of current pupils are at least in line with the outcomes for 2018. The most able pupils are beginning to make stronger progress. Leaders expect some further improvement to pupils' progress in 2019 but these outcomes remain below average overall.

Leaders have acted to improve the accuracy and reliability of assessment information and the tracking of pupils' attainment and progress over time. They have introduced a new and effective system to capture this information and have created opportunities for teachers to check standards with each other and with other schools to ensure that work is being assessed correctly. However, the tracking of students' progress in the sixth form is less effective.

External support

Leaders acted swiftly to commission a review of the school's safeguarding procedures following the last inspection. Leaders positively engaged with the review process in support of the school's designated safeguarding lead. This has led to rapid improvements in the arrangements for safeguarding pupils at the school. Trustees and governors have benefited from an external review of the school's arrangements for governance, provided by a consultant from the National Governance Association. Governors have positively engaged with this process and governance is rapidly strengthening as a result.