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13 February 2014

Mr Stuart Gardner
Headteacher
Chatham Grammar School for Boys
Maidstone Road
Holcombe
Chatham
ME4 6JB

Dear Mr Gardner

Special measures inspection of Chatham Grammar School for Boys

Following my visit with Diana Choulerton Her Majesty's Inspector and Helen Hutchings additional inspector to your school on 11 and 12 February 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013. 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 academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Academy leaders may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Interim Management Board, the Director of Children's Services for Medway, the Education Funding Agency and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely
Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by :
 - making sure that teachers use information about students' different levels of abilities and needs to plan lessons that challenge all students and extend their thinking
 - providing frequent and detailed verbal and written feedback that helps students to check and improve their work
 - getting students involved in challenging, varied and exciting activities in all lessons so that they remain interested and behave consistently well.

- Improve achievement so that students make good or better progress across all subjects and at all levels, especially in English and in the sixth form, by:
 - identifying different groups of students clearly so that all leaders, managers and teachers understand and use the same information to check students' progress, especially those eligible for pupil premium support and those entering early for GCSE and AS and A-level examinations
 - making sure that all teachers understand what good and outstanding achievement means for high-ability students so that their progress can be checked thoroughly and accurately
 - checking and analysing students' progress in each class, across each subject and across the whole academy, and comparing it to the evaluations of the quality and consistency of teaching and learning.

- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and governance by:
 - taking urgent action to eradicate weak and inadequate teaching
 - developing the skills of senior leaders and governors so that they can check accurately whether the actions they are taking to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching and learning are having enough impact
 - making sure that all leaders in charge of subjects know how to check the quality and consistency of teaching and how to improve it if it is not good enough
 - ensuring that the governing body takes part in, and responds to, an external review of governance to identify what support and training governors need.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 February 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including the academy's complaints procedures and the ways in which leaders communicate with the parent body. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher and the headteacher, groups of pupils, a group of parents and carers, two members of the Interim Management Board (IMB), other leaders within the academy and teaching school alliance consultants who are assisting leaders in improving the quality of teaching. Inspectors observed a total of 22 lessons, of which eight were jointly observed with academy leaders.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit which took place in October 2013, further changes to staffing have taken place. Eight teachers have left and five new teachers have joined the academy. Interim management board members have made several appointments to leadership positions which are scheduled to take effect from Easter 2014. Rochester Grammar School's Thinking Schools' Trust is now the official sponsor of the academy. Members of the IMB have agreed to continue their oversight of the academy until its removal from special measures.

Achievement of pupils at the school

GCSE results in 2013 did not mirror the 2012 outcomes, when all boys secured five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Although overall progress in English in 2013 was in line with the national average, some boys with very high attainment on entry to the academy failed to meet their potential. The picture in mathematics, however, showed greater promise. In 2013, more boys exceeded expectations and there was little slippage in the results they secured when measured against their attainment on entry in Year 7.

Leaders have reconsidered their approach to early entry and this strategy is now being carefully and effectively targeted. For example, November early entries in mathematics have already yielded a significant improvement in the percentage of boys securing the top grades of A* and A. However, overall in 2013, not enough boys secured the highest grades across many subjects, including in the sixth form.

Since the beginning of September, new systems to set demanding targets and monitor boys' progress towards them have been introduced. Boys with whom inspectors met knew their targets well and scrutiny of their work in lessons indicated in many instances that they were making good progress towards meeting them, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, there was less evidence of this good practice in Key Stage 3.

Teachers now provide boys with after-school structured catch-up or study support sessions for all subjects at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Boys who are lagging behind are directed to attend these sessions. This initiative is valued by students and their parents and carers. Boys told inspectors, 'There is no reason to underachieve now. Homework is set and it is chased. If you need help or guidance, teachers provide it. This was not the case in the past.'

In lessons, achievement across all subjects is variable, because the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good. However, although gaps in achievement between those eligible for free school meals and non-eligible students have yet to close, there is good evidence that teachers know who these boys are and they are developing strategies to address their needs more effectively.

The quality of teaching

Students with whom inspectors met were clear that, in general, the quality of teaching has significantly improved. Their parents, carers and inspectors agree. Students attribute this to the strong steer provided by the headteacher, particularly in relation to standards. For example, one boy told inspectors, 'Management gets things done now. Teachers plan their lessons and they are more interesting. In the past, no one chased you. Now all teachers set homework and, if you don't do it, you're put in detention.'

Teachers routinely plan lessons that are designed to promote reflection and enquiry. Consequently, many lessons are more interesting, varied and provide a range of tasks, targeted at individual students to challenge their thinking and inspire them to delve further. Most teachers now use a range of probing questions to stimulate discussion. However, in some lessons, questioning strategies are still too superficial and fail to develop an enthusiasm for learning.

Helpful marking was in evidence across all subjects within the academy, and students say this has greatly improved. They favour the opportunity provided by some teachers to respond to the marking but this aspect is not yet fully developed across all subjects.

In the best lessons, teachers make good use of information about students' prior attainment to plan lessons that match their needs and foster curiosity. However, in too many lessons, this information is not yet used well enough, and in some instances, it is not used at all.

In an excellent mathematics lesson, students were challenged in a question-and-answer session in relation to issues of probability. This was not a 'free for all'. Students were carefully targeted to answer questions that would test them at their individual level. Independent group work by ability that followed involved a specific and different level of challenge for each group. As a result, all students made good progress and much energy was generated as each group set about its task.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy provides a calm environment which students value and respect. Boys with whom inspectors spoke say that behaviour in lessons has improved. They feel safe in the academy and know that if they raise concerns leaders will address them. The headteacher has introduced appropriate sanctions to address poor attitudes or unacceptable behaviour. Systems to monitor homework and boys' attitudes in lessons are robust. Boys who infringe or whose behaviour is unacceptable know they will face the consequences of their actions.

Inspectors witnessed no incidents of disruption in lessons and generally positive attitudes to learning; even on occasions when the teaching was dull, boys were patient and compliant. Attendance is above average and students are punctual to lessons. They particularly value the new rewards system and the Friday night club run by the headteacher and other staff in recognition of boys' efforts to improve their attainment by attending after-school catch-up and study support. They spoke enthusiastically about these sessions and say that they now feel more valued and respected by staff.

Parents and carers, too, have noticed a change in their sons' attitudes. They were keen to advise inspectors of the feedback they receive at home. One parent told inspectors, 'My son complained initially about the insistence on rules, for example to do with wearing the correct uniform. He still doesn't like it but he accepts it, because things are improving and teachers help him more. Now he often comes home "buzzing" with what he's been learning.'

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the first monitoring visit in October 2013, leaders have taken decisive steps to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers are fully aware that mediocre teaching will no longer be tolerated. Those that have been unwilling or unable to improve their teaching have already left or are leaving. Teachers that remain are keen to improve their practice, and feel valued and well supported to do so.

Under the sponsorship of Rochester Grammar School's Thinking Schools' Trust, teachers now access other schools within the trust and the teaching school alliance to observe best practice and learn from others' experiences. Leaders are determined to secure rapid improvements in teaching. They model high expectations at all times and observe teaching regularly and often. The feedback and support that teachers receive following these observations and the developmental targets they are given have led to improved performance in the classroom.

Members of the IMB are clear about their roles and accountabilities. They have high expectations of academy leaders and conduct routine monitoring activity such as learning walks and scrutiny of leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning. They have backed the headteacher when the need for disciplinary action has arisen, and expect to see rapid improvement and clear evidence of the impact of leaders' actions.

Necessary changes to the timing of the school day have been secured with relative ease. Parents and carers were consulted and the new timetable introduced with effect from January. Boys and teachers rate the change and feel that the timings have improved the quality of the boys' learning.

Teachers, students, and parents and carers attest to significant change for the better. Boys say that systems are now more 'efficient'. Their parents and carers agree. Parents with whom inspectors met acknowledged their initial anger at the judgement of special measures and the way in which they first heard of this on the local media. They fully admit that they vented their anger towards the executive headteacher and the headteacher. However, they now feel that change was for the better and that leaders have made every effort to open channels of communication with the parent body. Concerns can now be expressed and addressed through the parent council, which meets on a termly basis.

Leaders are fully aware that a small minority of parents and carers remain unconvinced. However, a growing number of parents and carers are evidencing their support by giving freely of their time to help with repairs and renovation of the buildings. During the visit, inspectors scrutinised the academy's complaints policy along with individual case studies. Inspectors found that the policy meets requirements and that it is being correctly applied.

Although parents, carers and students recognise the overall improvements in teaching, they also expressed concern at the number of temporary teachers within the academy. Inspectors share their concerns. However, most of the temporary posts will cease at Easter, when newly appointed teachers will join the academy on a permanent basis.

External support

Leaders have made judicious use of consultancy from within the teaching school alliance and from best practice within the trust. In particular, an Ofsted-trained inspector, reporting directly to the IMB, has quality assured leaders' judgements of teaching. Joint observations conducted with leaders during this visit were in complete agreement.