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Mrs Maria Nightingale
Principal
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Dear Mrs Nightingale

Special measures monitoring inspection of Irlam and Cadishead College

Following my visit to your school with Victoria Atherton, Ofsted Inspector, on 17 and 18 May 2016, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers in those subjects where there is proven leadership capacity to support these 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 Salford Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2015

- Raise standards and secure good or better progress for all groups of students, across all subjects, in all year groups, particularly in English and mathematics, by improving the quality of teaching so it is at least good, by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and ensuring all teaching engages students well and makes clear what is expected of them in their learning
 - ensuring teachers' assessments are regular and accurate in order to inform effectively their planning for students' progress in lessons and over time
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve so that all students, particularly the most able, receive appropriate challenge and support when needed
 - making sure teachers consistently let students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, give them opportunity to act on this advice, and systematically check that learning has progressed
 - making sure students have learned securely what they need to, before moving on to new learning
 - making sure students take more responsibility for their learning, through improving their punctuality to college and promoting their eagerness to learn
 - sharing the good practice that already exists in pockets, across the college more widely.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership at all levels, including governance, in order to improve students' achievement by:
 - developing secure, reliable and robust systems for checking on the progress of students across the college
 - ensuring there is effective support for all leaders, especially middle leaders and governors, to address the gaps in their skills and understanding of their roles in order that they can check effectively on what is working well or not and so make the necessary improvements
 - making sure all staff have consistently high expectations of students' behaviour and attitudes to learning, including their prompt arrival to lessons
 - implementing the changes planned for the curriculum so that it better meets the needs of students in the main school and sixth form and drives forward the development of students' literacy and mathematics skills in all areas
 - ensuring that the plans to address the underachievement of different groups of students are driven well across the college, that appropriate actions are taken and that their impact is checked on a regular basis.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 May 2016

Evidence

The inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons, read the school's action plan and other documents, scrutinised pupils' work, reviewed the school's website and visited an assembly and a tutorial. They met with the principal, other senior leaders, members of staff with specific responsibilities, three groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body, the national leader of education who provides support for the school, the chief executive and chief operating officer of Salford Academy Trust and the assistant director of education for Salford Children's Services.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there have been a number of staff changes: four members of teaching staff, including the leaders of English and science, left the school in March. New leaders of science and mathematics have joined the school and a new leader of English will start in June. An art teacher and four support staff have recently taken up posts. A further eight teachers will be leaving the school at the end of the summer term. The school has successfully recruited new staff. Pupil numbers have remained stable.

The school's plans to become an academy sponsored by Salford Academy Trust have progressed. The academy conversion process is scheduled for completion by the end of this academic year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has improved over the last three months; leaders are now demonstrating better capacity than previously to improve provision and raise standards. The principal and vice-principal know staff and pupils well and lead by example.

The school's leaders and managers took rapid and decisive action following the last monitoring inspection. They put in place recovery plans that refocused the school's attention on key priorities and identified the precise steps needed to accelerate improvement. Their plans have been quality assured by an external consultant and are being implemented with rigour.

The transition steering group (TSG) meets regularly and scrutinises the school's progress. Comprising school leaders, governors, representatives of Salford Academy Trust and the local authority, the TSG ensures that the school's journey from being a school maintained by the local authority to a sponsored academy is as smooth as possible. The focus of the TSG is firmly upon raising standards. The group ensures that the school makes a swift response to any slippage in the implementation of the plan. The governing body is well informed about the school's work.

The roles of senior leaders have been reviewed by the principal to ensure completion of those tasks that would have fallen to the two senior leaders who continue to be absent.

The capacity of the leadership team has been boosted by the work of the chief operating officer of Salford Academy Trust, who provides considerable support for the school's management of human resources and finance. The direction of the school is clear and reinforced through displays around the building that celebrate good work, emphasise leaders' expectations and urge pupils to 'Aspire, Work Hard and Achieve'.

There has been a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. All teachers have received additional training. 'Golden door' opportunities have been scheduled to enable teachers to observe colleagues' work by visiting lessons. Those teachers who have already taken up these opportunities have found them valuable. Leaders' quality assurance of teaching is systematically completed and recorded. Leaders are now checking that improvement points identified during observations of lessons and through scrutiny of pupils' work are acted upon.

Subject leadership has been strengthened markedly through the appointment of new heads of mathematics, science and English. The leader of mathematics has brought energy, drive and rigour to the department. In the short time since she joined the school, she has improved schemes of work and is focusing intensively on plugging the gaps in the learning of Year 11 pupils so that they are better prepared for their forthcoming GCSE examinations. Similarly, the head of science has taken swift action to ensure that pupils in Year 11 make up some lost ground. Her review of pupils' coursework has established a clear baseline for improvement. The leader of English has already started work on improving the curriculum even though she has not yet taken up post. This will ensure, for instance, that pupils do not repeat work by reading the same class novels in different year groups as has happened previously due to past weak curriculum planning. There is variability in the skills of middle leaders in other subjects, however, to influence the practice of teachers within their teams.

The careers information and guidance programme provided for pupils in key stage 4 is of good quality. Virtually all pupils in Year 11 have secured appropriate places for post-16 education or training. Further work is planned to improve pupils' understanding of and access to apprenticeships. A 'scholars' programme' has been introduced, in conjunction with Salford University, to raise pupils' aspirations. The development of careers education in the school is a significant success and is an indication of the school's more outward-facing nature.

A member of support staff has been given dedicated time to manage the school library. Along with key members of staff, she is actively promoting reading, including through the new 'Chatterbooks' reading club for Year 7 pupils. The library has been decluttered and is now a tidy, attractive hub of the school. Reading is a key theme in the school's planned activity to support the transition of pupils from primary schools into Year 7.

The school has abundant data about pupils' performance that gives subject leaders better insight on the relative progress being made by different classes. Nevertheless, this information is not yet routinely or effectively used by teachers to plan to meet the needs of groups of pupils.

The school's leaders have not yet begun to consider how they will adjust their assessment policy to take into account the removal of national curriculum levels. Subject leaders are adapting schemes of work to meet the more rigorous demands of the new national curriculum, but subject planning and assessment are not synchronised.

While many staff are highly positive about the direction of the school and energised by the changes taking place, there is low morale among some staff who feel that senior leaders do not always communicate effectively. Leaders are planning to survey staff opinion more fully to take account of their views.

The school's website does not comply with the government's requirements on information that should be published. Governors are aware that some of the school's policies are out of date. They have a programme in place for revising these before the end of the summer term. The quality of information provided about the curriculum is variable across subjects. Parents are not given enough information about the examination syllabuses their children are following.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are working very hard to improve pupils' learning. The quality of teaching is improving and most teachers are willing to reflect on and adapt their practice. Their planning has improved and lessons have become more focused and interesting. Teachers are enjoying the opportunities they now have to discuss teaching and learning across the curriculum. They are open to sharing ideas and learning from each other.

Pupils in key stage 3 who spoke with inspectors think that there are more opportunities for problem-solving and mathematical challenges now, particularly since the arrival of the new mathematics leader. Their views of teaching are in the main more positive than those of older pupils, who have found frequent changes of teachers over time destabilising. The environment in some classrooms has been developed to support pupils' learning. In French, pupils made use of helpful visual prompts for learning. They spoke French with self-assurance and fluency because the teacher had created a climate in which they believed they could succeed. In art, teachers are now insisting on higher standards of work and providing encouragement that builds pupils' self-belief. In food technology, pupils took pride in their baking and were careful to clean up scrupulously in response to the teacher's clear instructions and positive support. Good practice with regard to health and safety was insisted upon.

In some cases, teachers do not make their expectations clear enough about basic things such as how long pupils have to complete an activity and whether this should be done in silence or talked about with peers. Some teaching does not give pupils a clear enough picture of what success looks like. This leads to them not knowing how to produce work of the highest possible standard. There are some inspiring examples of good-quality pupils' work displayed in open spaces around the school but the sharing of good work in lessons and in classroom display is not as evident. Pupils also do not have enough opportunities to explain their reasoning verbally.

The school has adopted a feedback policy that requires teachers to identify the next steps in pupils' learning. This is being applied consistently across the school and is having a positive impact. There is some highly effective marking in English where pupils have clearly thought about the feedback they have received and improved their writing in response. The responses that pupils make to their teachers' feedback, however, are not always helpful in moving their learning on in other subjects. Pupils' books contain the school's literacy marking code and a set of basic expectations about the presentation of pupils' work. Neither of these is followed consistently. Significant numbers of pupils do not follow the presentation code and few teachers apply the marking code. This results in too much poorly presented work with basic errors that are not addressed. Some teachers do not identify when pupils misspell key words that they need to understand and use in particular subjects. Consequently, these errors persist.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The development of the student services facility has had a positive impact on supporting pupils' welfare. Pupils now enter the school through a dedicated entrance that is staffed to ensure that they receive a positive welcome at the start of the day and that any pupil who has a problem can receive immediate help. The staff who run student services have a good-humoured, nurturing approach that pupils appreciate. There is effective liaison between personal development leaders and student service staff. The school continues to work effectively with families and external agencies to support vulnerable pupils.

Pupils' attendance has improved across the school and is much closer to the national average than it was last year. Pupils' punctuality to school has improved and pupils are very rarely late to lessons. Leaders recognise that there is more work to be done with regard to the precise monitoring of punctuality at the start of the school day.

Improved levels of supervision around the school, along with greater insistence on basic standards of good conduct, have led to the school becoming a more positive, purposeful place. Most pupils wear their uniforms smartly. The school, including the dining area, is tidy now and free of litter. Most pupils take care of their environment.

Pupils' behaviour is improving. There has been a reduction in the number of incidents resulting in fixed-term exclusions for pupils because of poor behaviour. The number of pupils who have been permanently excluded has risen this year. This sanction has been used as a last resort in response to serious behavioural issues, often from pupils who have attended a variety of different schools because of poor behaviour in the past.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that behaviour is mostly better now in lessons but that there is still some disruption. On occasions, their learning is interrupted because teachers have to spend time managing behaviour. Inspectors did not observe any overtly disruptive behaviour. However, they did observe pupils 'switching off' during lessons and not re-engaging. Some pupils have difficulty concentrating for a sustained time and some do not have a strong enough work ethic. They do not pay enough attention to producing their best work. Some pupils' GCSE revision notes are not legible enough to serve their purpose and help them achieve in examinations.

Outcomes for pupils

The proportion of pupils in line to achieve five GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics, at grades A* to C, is predicted to rise marginally in 2016, but will still be significantly below the national average. The pupils' performance does not represent good progress from their starting points. The performance of pupils in mathematics continues to be weaker than that in English, attributable in part to the high level of turbulence in staffing in mathematics over time.

The gap in performance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school is narrowing, but disadvantaged pupils continue to underachieve significantly in comparison with other pupils nationally.

The school's information on the performance of pupils currently in Year 10 is more promising. This cohort is set to achieve better outcomes when they sit their GCSE examinations in 2017. Better progress is being made by pupils who are currently in key stage 3, in response to the higher expectations of teachers and better planning of learning. The few students who are currently in Year 13 are making reasonable progress on their academic and vocational programmes. All of them have secured university, college or training places.

Most pupils can read with reasonable fluency and there is a well-considered new programme in place to help pupils with poor basic skills in reading, handwriting and numeracy. Pupils' ability to synthesise information from different sources and to evaluate information is less well developed. Some pupils' speaking skills are also under-developed, particularly with regard to explaining their reasoning.

External support

The school receives support from a national teaching school. This has included substantial input to improve planning and assessment in English. This has been complemented by support from a partner school in Salford Academy Trust. The support has been effective in providing a foundation on which the new subject leader for English can build. The national leader of education from the teaching school has recently begun to provide support to develop the capacity of the senior leadership team.

The practical support for the school's human resource and finance management provided by the chief operating officer of Salford Academy Trust has had substantial impact. This has enabled an effective recruitment drive and freed up time for senior leaders to concentrate on improving teaching and learning. The chief operating officer has worked closely with the school's finance officer to ensure that the school's systems are robust and that financial accountability is strong. The assistant director of education for the local authority is an active partner within the TSG. Two independent consultants secured by Salford Academy Trust gave good support to the leadership team when they reviewed and refocused their action plans following the last monitoring inspection.