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13 September 2013

Mr J Kane  
Executive Headteacher  
Walton Hall School  
Stafford Road  
Eccleshall  
Stafford  
ST21 6JR

Dear Mr Kane

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Walton Hall School**

Following my visit with Sue Cox, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11–12 September 2013, 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 March 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed only after consultation with HMI.

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 Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013**

- Improve teaching by making sure that:
  - teachers receive training and individual feedback on their teaching so that they understand how to make learning in their lessons good or better
  - teachers have a clear understanding of the levels that pupils are working at and know how to use this information to set work at the right level of difficulty for pupils
  - teachers have clear targets for improvement with timescales which reflect the urgency of the school's situation and that these are reviewed regularly for impact on pupils' achievement
  - the outstanding teachers in the school are used to coach and model best practice for other teachers so that all aspire to provide high quality teaching.
  
- Improve achievement by making sure that:
  - systems for monitoring the progress made by pupils are fully developed so that the school's data is always compared to national data and the school can assess whether pupils are making required progress
  - daily reading sessions continue to be embedded to help pupils improve their reading skills.
  
- Improve the impact of leaders in the school, by:
  - reviewing the current management structure and establishing a leadership team which meets the needs of the school, including the reintroduction of subject leaders so that all subject areas can be developed fully
  - establishing a system to check pupils' progress accurately over time so that teachers can use the information to ensure that their teaching meets the needs of all pupils
  - reviewing the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 to ensure that the needs of all pupils are being met effectively through suitable courses in school or, where appropriate, from external providers
  - ensuring that the members of the new governing body understand their role in holding school leaders to account for their work and set leaders clear targets for improving the education provided in the school.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11–12 September 2013**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, a group of teachers, a group of students, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and two other board members and a representative from the local authority.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the substantive headteacher has left the school. Arrangements have been made for the executive headteacher and the acting head of school to remain in post until the end of March 2014. Three teaching assistants have left and six have joined.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The school's data indicate that there was considerable underachievement in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 during the last academic year. The progress made by last year's Year 11 was poor. This was at least in part because they did not have the opportunity to follow challenging enough courses or to take appropriate qualifications. Almost all qualifications that students took were at Entry Level rather than GCSE level. The school does not have a clear picture of the progress that students made in other subjects.

In the summer term, following the appointment of the new leaders and the related changes to the school, some students began to progress slightly better and to meet or exceed their targets. The executive headteacher and the acting head of school have worked closely with senior leaders and staff to ensure that new, challenging targets have been set for each student and that the curriculum is more appropriate. In the lessons observed during the monitoring inspection, students generally made at least reasonable and sometimes good progress.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching observed during the inspection ranged from inadequate to outstanding. Good teaching was seen in a range of lessons in different year groups and subjects.

The inspection took place during the first full teaching week of the academic year and the extent to which teachers had used assessment information about their new classes to plan their lessons varied. In the best examples, teachers had used information about students' prior attainment to pitch their lessons at the right level, so lessons got off to a prompt start and students were immediately engaged. In a few lessons, however, the tasks were too difficult or too easy for the students.

Although teachers generally adapted the lesson quickly once they realised, this highlighted that assessment information is not yet routinely used to plan lessons that precisely match students' needs.

Good questioning was a feature of the stronger teaching observed. Teachers used questions to probe students' understanding, to challenge them to think more, and to get them to extend their answers; for example, from one word to full sentences. They also gave students time to think and, where appropriate, to discuss. In these lessons, the pace was just right to keep students interested and engaged as well as giving them enough time to learn what was being taught. There was a smooth transition from one type of activity to another. This combination of strategies helped students to make good progress.

Signing is sometimes used to support students' communication but this is not frequent or consistent enough.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students who met with inspectors were definite in their views that the school had changed for the better in the last term. They commented that since the new senior leaders had joined the school, it was a happier place. One student commented that 'staff are happier and are more relaxed' and others agreed. They reflected that they do not get bored in lessons and that if the work is too easy or hard, they ask the teachers and it is changed for them. One student summarised the views of others by commenting, 'It's such a lovely place to be now.' Students also felt that bullying had 'gone down a lot'. Other students to whom inspectors spoke informally had similar views.

The number of students spending time out of class for reasons related to their behaviour has gone down considerably. Students are expected to remain in class unless they genuinely need some time to calm down, and staff help them to meet this expectation. The acting head of school disbanded the separate group that had been created for those with behavioural difficulties, and those students are now fully integrated into their age-related classes. One member of staff's role has been altered to give more continuity in the management of behaviour between the day and residential parts of the school. There was only one fixed-term exclusion during the summer term. Attendance last year was below the national average. This overall picture, however, masks considerable variation in individuals' attendance. Many students attend for over 95% of the time or more, while a small number of individuals have low attendance, which the school is tackling.

Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning during the monitoring inspection were positive. They have good relationships with staff and with each other. They moved sensibly around the school and socialised well at breaktimes and in the dining room. In lessons, they were very willing to work and tried hard to meet staff's

expectations. Where teaching was challenging, they responded well and enjoyed their success.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The executive headteacher and the acting head of school have had a very positive impact on staff's morale and their willingness to work together to improve the outcomes for students. Staff consistently reported to inspectors that they feel that the working atmosphere in the school is much better than a term ago, and that they are better informed and well supported.

These new leaders now have a clearer picture of the quality of teaching and what needs to be done next. They know which aspects need overall improvement, and where staff need individual support or challenge, and have begun to take appropriate action on both fronts. Leaders have clarified staff's roles and the expectations that they have of them, and staff are working hard to meet these expectations. Recent training has been sensibly focused on roles and responsibilities as well as on the use of data.

Data about students' prior and current attainment, alongside staff's knowledge about their individual needs, has been used carefully to put students into new teaching groups from September. Students are now taught in sets for English and mathematics. Around half the students in Years 10 and 11 are now taking English, mathematics and science at GCSE level, which represents a considerable improvement compared to last year's curriculum for this age group. Importantly, senior leaders plan to review groupings and courses shortly in order to make any changes needed and to ensure that all students are following suitably challenging pathways. At Key Stage 5, careful thought has been given to the qualifications that students can take, to ensure that there is better continuity and progression from Key Stage 4.

At Key Stage 3, adaptations to the humanities curriculum have been made in order to make the courses more challenging and interesting. Students are now reading on a daily basis, and the impact of this is being monitored. The curriculum for the students with the most complex needs at Key Stage 3 lacks direction and activities are not well matched to the students' needs. Senior leaders are aware of the need to tackle this with some urgency.

The interim executive board meets on a fortnightly basis. They ask probing questions about the actions the school is taking and the progress they are making. The Chair meets weekly with the senior leaders and provides a good level of support and challenge. The interim executive board is aware of the need to develop appropriate ways to visit classrooms in order to see some of the school's improvements in action.

## **External support**

The local authority has revised its statement of action and it is now fit for purpose. Sensibly, it has been aligned with the school's action plan, so the rationale for each action is much clearer. A range of support has been provided. The local authority has provided good quality support for staff training, which the school has appreciated. Support for English and mathematics has begun. The school link officer meets with senior leaders on a weekly basis and has a realistic understanding of the school's needs. She has arranged practical as well as strategic support; for example, for aspects of finance and buildings.

The school is also benefitting from support from other special schools, particularly the two federated schools for which the seconded senior leaders work. Support for developing a data tracking and assessment system has been particularly helpful.