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Mrs T Peters
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Peters

Special measures monitoring inspection of John Willmott School

Following my visit with Gwen Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 3–4 May 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 school's 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 January and February 2016.

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 authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. This is subject to consultation with me regarding the department involved.

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

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January and February 2016.

- Rapidly improve teaching and thereby achievement in Years 7 to 11, particularly for the most able pupils, by:
 - making sure that work which is set for pupils is appropriately challenging
 - asking probing questions that require pupils to think deeply
 - ensuring that pupils know how to improve their work
 - insisting that work is completed and presented neatly and accurately.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics across all year groups, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, by:
 - ensuring that teachers regularly check pupils' and learners' work so that they do not continue to make the same mistakes
 - improving the curriculum so that pupils and learners have opportunities to use a range of mathematical skills to solve problems.
- Improve teaching in science in Years 7 to 11 so that pupils can achieve much more than they currently do, including those who are disadvantaged, by making sure that all teachers have the skills to teach the subject effectively.
- Improve pupils' punctuality to lessons and behaviour in class in Years 7 to 11, particularly the behaviour of girls, by insisting that all teachers always follow the school's code of conduct policy.
- Improve learners' achievement in academic courses in the sixth form so that it matches their achievement in vocational courses.
- Improve the impact that all leaders, including governors, have on improving teaching, outcomes and behaviour by:
 - making sure that all senior and subject leaders have the skills to effectively check and improve teaching, achievement and behaviour
 - regularly checking the impact on pupils of the various improvement plans, including the subject action plans, and making sure that these plans contain clear targets and milestones
 - making sure that the information leaders have about low-level disruption in classes is used effectively to improve behaviour
 - insisting that teachers follow the school's marking policy so that pupils' work is accurate and neat and errors are noticed and corrected
 - providing specialist support to improve teaching in mathematics and science.

An external review of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 3 May 2017 to 4 May 2017

Evidence

Inspectors evaluated the school's work and held meetings with the headteacher, school leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding and the chair of the governing body. Meetings were held with those who provide external support to the school. Views of parents were considered from communication received by Ofsted and leaders' analysis of recent parental questionnaires.

Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 12 lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. Senior leaders accompanied them on some visits to lessons. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them in class. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, at social times and as they moved around the site. An inspector met formally with two groups of pupils.

A range of documents was evaluated, including the school's analysis of current pupils' attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance. Additional documentation was evaluated. For example, the school's statement of action, action plans, the school's procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher and a deputy headteacher have been appointed. The new headteacher was able to work alongside the previous headteacher, prior to taking up the appointment. There have been some changes and clarification of roles and accountabilities of senior leaders. An interim chair of governors has been appointed, and the way governors meet has been changed. Some teachers have left the school this year, but leaders have been able to successfully appoint replacements to almost all posts. They expect the school to be fully staffed for the start of the new academic year. Plans are in place for newly appointed staff to join the school before the end of the summer term to prepare for the start of the new school year.

Leaders and governors had made the decision for the school to join a well-regarded local multi-academy trust (MAT) before the previous inspection. The local authority supports this decision. The process of the school's conversion to become an academy is well underway. Strong, successful and beneficial links have already been forged with other schools in the MAT. However, continuing uncertainty about some financial matters has slowed the conversion process. At the time of this monitoring inspection, the leaders are still awaiting full resolution of these issues. As a result, the full benefits of being part of the MAT that leaders anticipate have not yet been realised.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new headteacher has brought an energy and enthusiasm towards tackling the challenges that the school faces. This approach has spread among staff. There is a culture of relishing challenge and developing carefully considered solutions. Staff are supportive of the changes and the development taking place at the school and ambitious for the future. Staff are working very hard to bring about change. Leaders are now responding effectively to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, actions taken last school year had a more limited impact.

Leaders check the quality of teaching using information from a variety of sources including observing lessons and checking pupils' work. Consequently, leaders judge accurately how well teachers are doing. Colleagues who do not meet expectations receive effective support to improve their practice. Over time, the number of colleagues who require additional development has reduced. Developing all teachers' skills is a high priority. Leaders evaluate the impact of teacher development through frequent monitoring of classrooms. A clear teacher development strategy exists, based on secure evidence from the classroom. For example, leaders identify that some teachers are not engaging pupils sufficiently well in learning. An approach to teaching has been developed in response to this. Leaders plan to evaluate its impact in one subject area before planning its implementation throughout the school. Teachers already benefit from training they have received about the school's revised systems to monitor pupils' progress. Their understanding of this information informs the discussions they have and supports their planning.

Middle leaders use coaching and development opportunities well. A national leader of education (NLE) supports the development of their skills to check and improve teaching, achievement and behaviour. As a result, middle leaders are clearly focused on their roles and developing confidence in required skills. They are enthusiastic and optimistic and excited about the direction the school is taking. Leaders have ensured consistency in specialist teaching staff in science and mathematics this year. This has enabled middle leaders in those subjects to develop a more consistent approach to teaching and expectations. This has a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment of these subjects, supports their attainment and leads to increased interest in these subjects post-16.

The required external review of the governing body was completed in spring 2016. Since then, the governing body has been restructured and an interim chair of governors appointed. As a result, some of the actions identified in the external review no longer apply. The interim chair of the governing body recognises the opportunities afforded by reprioritising the findings of the external review. Governors have completed an audit of their skills and started additional focused training. This has a positive impact on their work, for example, an increased awareness of how the school's performance compares with national comparators.

The governing body have been involved in the academy conversion process, and fully support this course of action.

At the last inspection, leaders were required to arrange an external review how the school uses the pupil premium. The review was carried out in summer 2016. It reported that little action had been taken up to the point of the review in response to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Since then, leaders have overhauled the pupil premium strategy and appointed a coordinator who liaises with leaders, teachers and other staff. There is now a clear focus on improving the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. A range of classroom and additional strategies are used to support these pupils.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding ensure that an effective culture of vigilance and awareness of actions to take exists within the school. Procedures and processes are compliant and given a high priority. All concerns that are identified are carefully recorded, and subsequent action tracked so leaders are secure that responses taken are appropriate. Strong links exist with specialist external agencies, so particular help can be provided when necessary. The school has clear procedures to address any concerns it receives. Senior leaders thoroughly investigate these issues and provide the headteacher with clear and valuable information to share with concerned parents. The formal complaints procedure is rarely required because other actions taken usually resolve issues. It is clear that when concerns are raised, leaders respond by appropriate changes of policy or practice, when required. Many parents are very positive about most aspects of the school, but some do not feel able to approach leaders to share their concerns. The headteacher is aware of this and is working hard to improve communication and access to the school for these parents.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have started successfully to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection to improve teaching. Many pupils are meeting teachers' high expectations regarding the presentation and organisation of their work. As a result, pupils now have more pride in the work they produce. Pupils say that teaching has improved, and they find lessons in English, science, physical education and art particularly exciting.

There are positive attitudes towards learning, especially among pupils with high prior attainment. When teaching is less effective, pupils are not fully involved in their learning. Teachers do not always notice this and so do not address it, so some pupils lose learning time. Positive relationships between pupils and staff are clearly evident in classrooms, regardless of pupils' starting points. Staff now have the opportunity to capitalise on this to improve work rates in lessons.

Teachers are well versed in the use of assessment information. They know how well their pupils are doing over time and use this to plan specific strategies and

approaches to support progress. For example, more challenging questions are often directed to more-able pupils, and more in-depth answers expected. However, in some cases, teachers do not target their questions at specific pupils, or accept answers that are not sufficiently developed. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use this in their teaching. For example, teachers use, and develop pupils' confidence in using, subject-specific terminology in their explanations and written work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are very positive about the praise they now receive from staff, including when contact is made with home about what they have done well. However, they feel that the value of reward points could be enhanced to make them more motivational.

Leaders routinely monitor the attendance of different groups of pupils. A wide range of actions are routinely used to support pupils' attendance. This includes greater involvement of parents and rewarding pupils whose attendance is improving. Despite these actions, attendance remains below the national average but is currently high for pupils in Years 9 and 11. Leaders commissioned an external review of attendance improvement strategies. It concluded that the impact of recent initiatives have yet to be fully realised. Pupils' punctuality to lessons is improving as a result of high levels of staff vigilance and changes to the structure of the school day. Pupils comment that better punctuality has reduced disruption to learning at the start of lessons.

Teachers record incidents of low-level disruption that occur in lessons. These records provide leaders with a clear view of how well pupils meet expectations. Regular updates to staff identify which types of conduct issues are more prevalent, and these are subsequently targeted. These actions have proved effective because the number of incidents of low-level disruption recorded are declining. Pupils' experience supports leaders' analysis, and they say that this aspect of conduct is improving at the school.

Pupils feel safe and secure when they are at school. They report that there is a high degree of tolerance and respect for those who are different from them. Measures are taken to support vulnerable pupils and they are encouraged to use the facilities and support provided in the inclusion faculty.

Leaders record consistently and routinely bullying and discriminatory behaviour that occurs in school. They have a clear picture of the types of these behaviours and ensure that appropriate actions are taken in response to when they occur. Evaluation shows that these types of behaviours are relatively rare and dealt with successfully. Pupils readily identify members of staff they would report bullying to and are confident with how their concerns are dealt with. Parents express more concern than pupils about how well the school tackles such incidents. Pupils identify

that high level of staff supervision and prompt action stops physical disturbance from taking place or escalating at school.

Outcomes for pupils

Actions taken last year to improve outcomes did not have a markedly positive impact in summer 2016. Although the overall rate of progress was similar to the national rate, there were variations for different groups of pupils. The progress of disadvantaged pupils was one third of a grade lower than other pupils nationally. Pupils with high levels of prior attainment made three quarters of a grade less progress than pupils with similar starting points nationally. Variation between subjects was also apparent. For example, progress in science, humanities and modern foreign languages was well below that of the national average.

Since September 2016, new systems have been introduced to set targets for pupils and monitor the progress they make. Information about how well pupils are doing is collected regularly and based on formal assessments. Leaders check the standard of assessments and verify marking with colleagues in other schools. As a result, leaders and teachers have a very clear picture of how well current pupils are doing and can readily identify which pupils require additional support.

Leaders' analysis of recent assessment information identifies that the differences between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are narrowing, albeit slowly. High-prior-attaining pupils, particularly in younger year groups, are making more progress than in the past. Leaders expect the proportion of pupils set to achieve the English Baccalaureate to improve markedly this year, particularly among high-prior-attaining pupils. In science, pupils' progress has been supported by teacher consistency and attainment is set to improve. However, similar improvements are not yet secure in humanities or modern foreign languages.

In summer 2016, strong performance in applied general qualifications was in contrast to outcomes in academic qualifications in the sixth form. This followed a similar pattern to results for previous students. Currently, the proportion of sixth form students expected to achieve higher grades in academic qualifications looks set to improve, reducing the difference between the two types of qualification. There is variable success for students who need to retake GCSE-level qualifications in English and mathematics. This has resulted in some students needing to adjust their sixth form study programmes.

External support

Leaders and teachers benefit from several sources of high-quality external support. Those providing this support comment on the readiness of staff to work with them this year, and the high value they now place on the support and challenge on offer.

Colleagues from the MAT provide effective support, which has had a high impact on the school this year. This support has focused on helping leaders to introduce revisions to pupils' targets and the way information is collected about how well pupils are doing throughout the year. Comprehensive information is available to leaders and teachers. They use this information with increasing skill to identify how the improvements across the school impact on pupils' outcomes. Training and support about how to get the most information out of these systems ensures that they are used well.

Leaders from the MAT also provide successful development and support for newly qualified teachers. Leaders have appointed several colleagues new to teaching for next year. Plans are in place to ensure appropriate professional support and development. These are personalised to meet individual needs, to support a successful induction into a teaching career.

Governors have commissioned an NLE to develop the skills and capacity of senior and middle leaders. As a result of this work, leaders are more confident in their roles. The NLE provides support across the school, successfully working alongside leaders to monitor the quality of provision in their areas. The NLE challenges and supports leaders to improve their work and that of their colleagues.

The local authority's commissioned improvement services meet leaders regularly to review and evaluate the work they do. Leaders' judgements of the school's overall effectiveness are validated and clear actions are identified and followed-up rigorously at subsequent meetings. Challenge is provided through external evaluation of clear, objective evidence from a variety of sources. Those involved in this process are able to identify which aspects of the school have demonstrated improvement over time. Leaders involved in this process are adopting a similar culture when working with colleagues in school, improving accountability.