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Mr Alastair McKenzie
Principal
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Dear Mr McKenzie

Special measures monitoring inspection of Kings College Guildford

Following my visit with Harry Ingham, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 20–21 March 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2016. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive working group, the chief executive officer of the Guildford Education Partnership multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2016.

- Increase the impact of leadership and management by:
 - improving the accuracy of self-evaluation so that it focuses rigorously on the impact of the school's work on pupils' progress in all year groups
 - ensuring that improvement plans have clear targets and success criteria that can be measured at certain points in the year so that governors and leaders can monitor progress more accurately
 - holding teachers to account for pupils' achievement in all key stages
 - ensuring that governors use a wider range of information on which to challenge leaders on outcomes for pupils in all year groups
 - ensuring that oversight provided by the sponsoring trust is sharply focused on outcomes, in particular in English and science and for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and boys.
- Urgently improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and boys by:
 - ensuring that work in lessons is appropriately challenging for them
 - making regular and accurate checks on how well they are doing
 - monitoring the impact of the pupil premium grant on disadvantaged pupils' progress and attainment regularly, rigorously and against other pupils nationally
 - ensuring that their attendance rates at least match national averages for all pupils.
- Improve outcomes in English and science so that rates of achievement at least match national averages by ensuring that teaching:
 - creates a culture that actively promotes a love of reading
 - improves pupils' progress in key stage 3, so that they are well prepared for their GCSE courses.
- Improve behaviour by:
 - eliminating low-level disruption in lessons
 - ensuring that pupils conduct themselves well in corridors and playgrounds, and that they do not use homophobic or derogatory language.

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

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 20 to 21 March 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of relevant information provided by leaders. They met with the principal and a vice principal to consider the impact of leaders' work since the last inspection. They also held meetings with other senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils, and representatives from the executive working group (EWG) and the Guildford Education Partnership (GEP) trust. Inspectors and senior leaders visited lessons together to observe learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. Together with English and mathematics subject leaders, they reviewed a sample of work from pupils in Years 8 and 10. Although inspectors considered how leaders are tackling all of the areas for improvement that were identified during the inspection in December 2016, they placed particular emphasis on the impact leaders' work is having on the standards in the school.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, one member of staff has left and another has joined the school. The trust's practice development leader, who was working closely with the school, is currently on maternity leave. Her teaching and coaching work is being delivered by senior leaders in the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous visit, leaders' ambition to ensure that the school improves rapidly has been sustained. The impact of their actions on standards in the school has begun to gather pace. Staff are determined to keep improving the school for the benefit of the pupils in their care. Pupils reflect positively about how their school has changed over the past year. They talked to inspectors about the improvements they recognise in the quality of their lessons and the support they receive from their teachers. They are particularly proud of how better behaviour in lessons and around the site contributes to making their school a 'happy community'. There are some indications that their views are beginning to be shared within the local area. Leaders are rightly pleased to have recently hosted visits from representatives of other schools, who came to learn about aspects of the school's journey of improvement. However, leaders recognise there is further work to do to change less-positive opinions that have been established over time, and which contribute to the school not having a full complement of pupils on roll.

Leaders' perseverance with the newly introduced assessment system now enables them to identify the impact of the school's work on pupils' progress more accurately than in the past. By measuring current outcomes against both realistic and ambitious targets, leaders can identify incremental improvements in the rates of progress that pupils make across their subjects, while remaining suitably

aspirational about what pupils can and should achieve. This detailed and valid information supports leaders in holding teachers to account for the difference their work is making to pupils. However, during this inspection, leaders did not always reflect on how they know whether standards for key groups of learners or in particular subjects are rising rapidly enough towards meeting national expectations.

Subject leaders now have greater ownership of staff training within their departments than had previously been the case. This enables professional development work to be more closely matched to subject-specific needs. Senior leaders check that subject leaders' training plans for their departments are fit for purpose and retain a focus on the school's priorities of subject knowledge, challenge and feedback. Leaders retain a useful overview of the quality of teaching in the school, and use this to direct relevant ongoing additional support where needed by individual members of staff.

The EWG, which still has responsibility for governance for the school, continues to hold leaders to account for the impact of their actions. The accurate and reliable information from the now-established assessment systems in school supports them effectively in doing this, as do helpful reports from senior and middle leaders about their work. Regular and focused visits to school help members of the EWG to test out what leaders tell them about improvements in the school. EWG members make accurate judgements about what they learn, using their relevant skills and expertise well. The review of governance recommended at the previous inspection has not yet been carried out, since the EWG arrangement is a temporary one.

The GEP trust remains actively committed to the school both strategically and practically. It has a clear understanding of the long-term challenges and opportunities associated with the school. It provides useful capacity to support this small school in developing expertise across a wider group of staff, for example through moderating pupils' work and sharing effective teaching practice.

Leaders use their 'action, impact, next steps' document to reflect on the school's journey of improvement. They are able to identify clear actions they have taken against the areas for improvement and the result of these actions, although this is not always linked to their impact on pupils' outcomes. As yet, leaders have not adapted their approach to self-evaluation as standards have risen. This risks them not identifying wider aspects of provision that may require greater consideration as school improvement priorities evolve, such as the extent to which the key stage 3 creative curriculum ensures that pupils have access to a suitably broad and balanced range of subjects.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The conducive-to-learning environment evident during the previous monitoring visit has been sustained. Pupils are respectful of each other and the adults who support their learning. Very little low-level disruptive behaviour was observed during

inspectors' visits to lessons. Pupils rise to teachers' suitably high expectations for them to behave well and to complete their classwork and homework with much more care than was evident in the past.

Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan learning that builds appropriately over time, particularly at key stage 4. Consequently, pupils now make increasingly secure progress, although this is not always rapid enough to enable them to catch up quickly from previous underperformance. Where learning is most effective, teachers build increasingly precisely on previous levels of understanding. They use questioning carefully to challenge pupils to move on rapidly or think deeply about their work. For example, during the inspection, thoughtful questioning in English and history provoked pupils' mature interpretation of the concepts they were considering.

Pupils who need it receive useful extra help to promote their literacy skills. This work builds their confidence as well as improving aspects of their writing such as grammar, spelling and punctuation. Pupils value this additional support, and apply the relevant skills to their written work in English and other subjects. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are known well by staff, and find their learning passports helpful in understanding what they need to do to improve. Consequently, rates of progress for these groups of pupils are, on average, at least as rapid as for other pupils in the school.

While improvements to the quality of teaching across the school are evident, inconsistencies remain between and within subjects. Although teachers have a wealth of information about the needs and prior learning of the pupils in their class, they do not always use it as carefully as they could to plan next steps for different groups of pupils. This is particularly the case for those pupils who are ready to move on more rapidly and to further develop their academic resilience and independence. In the creative foundation subjects, it is not clear how planning supports pupils of different ages and prior experience to make rapid progress as they move through their key stage 3 learning. Leaders recognise that this aspect of the curriculum, which is being approached differently this year, needs further thought to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to make strong progress over time across a suitably broad range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

This aspect of the school's improvement work is securely established. Pupils now see behaving appropriately as 'the norm' and recognise this as the most notable change in the school since the last inspection. Staff reflect with similar positivity, and parents and carers responding to the Parent View online survey also indicate their perception of an improving picture. Derogatory and homophobic language has all but been eradicated, and pupils are clear that staff take prompt and effective action if it does occur.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and act consistently if pupils do not meet these standards. Where individual pupils struggle to behave appropriately over time, leaders work with them and their families to understand the reasons why, so that support can be put in place that meets their needs. Leaders' careful records of behaviour incidents, including those warranting a fixed-term exclusion, show them to be declining over time. However, leaders recognise that exclusions remain too high and are working to address this through reviewing effective and appropriate alternatives. Useful training supports leaders' continuing focus on ensuring that all staff manage low-level disruptive behaviour consistently well.

Absence rates are declining slowly over time, but remain above the national average. Leaders understand the individual contexts that contribute to these figures, such as those pupils whose learning needs are met by attending an alternative provision on a part-time basis. However, they do not view this as an excuse to lower their expectations for improving overall attendance rates further, so that they become at least in line with the national average. Their work to improve the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has been the most successful, with their absence rates now 4% lower than at the same point last year, although still above national figures. Similarly, the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced by approximately 20% over the past year.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders' performance information paints a convincing picture of pupils' progress accelerating and becoming more secure than it was in the past. The rigorous and consistent approach to assessment now in place, supported by teachers working alongside colleagues in other schools to check their judgements, lends confidence to this. Work reviewed by inspectors and leaders during the inspection also supports the accuracy of teachers' and leaders' judgements about how well pupils are achieving.

Year 11 pupils' outcomes across a range of subjects have improved notably over the course of the year. This is because pupils' rates of progress are accelerating, particularly in science and mathematics, albeit from a low starting point. More pupils are currently identified as working at least at standard pass level in English language than was the case by the end of Year 11 last year. In a number of other subjects, particularly physical education, the percentage of pupils working at a grade 4 level has at least doubled since November 2017. However, current attainment in many subjects, including mathematics, English literature, science and the humanities remains well below average. This is because pupils have yet to catch up from a prolonged period of underachievement over their time at the school. Rates of progress in history and religious education are of particular concern.

Lower down the school, the picture is increasingly positive. In key stage 3, for instance, pupils are achieving standards in a number of subjects, including science, history and information and communication technology, that would indicate secure progress from their starting points. This pattern is not currently consistent across the broad range of subjects, and the picture is less clear for creative subjects such as design and technology and the arts. However, overall it represents standards rising as a result of increasingly effective teaching and learning over time.

Key groups of pupils are achieving better than in the past. For example, in Year 11, boys are currently making slightly better progress than girls across a broad range of subjects. Those who benefit from additional support to improve their literacy improved their reading age almost twice as fast as their chronological age over the last twelve months. Across a range of year groups, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are frequently making more rapid progress than other pupils in the school, as a result of the effective support they receive. They are, nonetheless, still achieving below other pupils nationally, and leaders recognise that there is further work to do to continue to reduce these differences.

External support

In addition to using support provided by being part of the GEP trust, leaders seek opportunities to make effective use of links with other organisations. For example, a close working relationship with a local independent school is supporting the most able pupils' learning in science. This is helping standards to rise in this subject, with the proportion of Year 11 pupils currently working at standard pass level in Biology, Chemistry and Physics having improved dramatically from the equivalent measure last year.

Leaders' focus on raising pupils' aspirations benefits from their investment in working closely with the University of Surrey. Pupils value and enjoy the range of activities and events that they have the opportunity to participate in, which the Raising Aspirations Leader coordinates to ensure that as many pupils are involved as possible. Almost 30 events have been run so far this year, with pupils reflecting positively on how the activities have widened their horizons about future possibilities and stimulated their interest in learning. Opportunities to involve parents in events such as the 'Ready Steady Cook Family Challenge' also help to build effective working relationships between the school and the local community.