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13 June 2018

Mrs Rochelle Conefrey  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Conefrey

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Kirkby High School**

Following my visit to your academy on 15–16 May 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 February 2017. 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 continue to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing board and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Mackenzie

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017**

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to urgently enhance outcomes for all groups of pupils across all subjects, especially for disadvantaged pupils, boys and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, by:
  - ensuring that all teachers have the skills to assess pupils' progress accurately
  - ensuring that teachers use accurate assessment information to plan lessons to suit the needs of all pupils
  - making sure that teachers have high expectations of what all pupils should achieve for their age and from their respective starting points
  - ensuring that teachers' questioning is used to challenge and stretch the thinking of the most able pupils
  - developing and implementing a policy which is followed by all teachers to improve pupils' literacy skills.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
  - raising attendance for all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities
  - ensuring the consistent application of the school's behaviour policy to reduce disruption in lessons
  - continuing to reduce the rates of exclusion.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
  - ensuring that all leaders rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes so that they have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
  - sharpening school development planning so that it is more effective in driving improvement
  - developing the skills of leaders of different subjects and groups so that they are able to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement
  - ensuring that leaders use the pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding more effectively to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and younger pupils who have fallen behind
  - ensuring that the sponsor and governors rigorously hold all leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- 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.

**Priorities for further improvement identified during the first monitoring inspection that took place in September 2017**

- Improve teachers' skills in:
  - planning lessons which pupils find interesting and engaging
  - challenging all pupils to think deeply about their ideas and opinions
  - developing pupils' abilities to express themselves with confidence
  - providing the right level of work for all groups of pupils in lessons, particularly the most able.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 15 to 16 May 2018**

### **Evidence**

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, members of the governing body and a group of faculty leaders. I met with the trust's chair, executive headteacher, head of school improvement and assistant headteacher (inclusion). With you, I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and I examined their work. I spoke to pupils during their break and lunchtimes.

### **Context**

You continue in the role of headteacher and are currently restructuring the roles and responsibilities of members of the school's senior leadership team. The trust's executive headteacher is currently the temporary accounting officer due to the recent retirement of the chief executive officer.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

You have continued to drive school improvement through passionate and skilful leadership. Staff agree that the school is improving, and many aspects are improving quickly. Teachers are very supportive of your reforms and acknowledge that your successes have been achieved while you have remained mindful about ensuring that their workloads are manageable. Faculty leaders welcome the additional responsibility they have for improvements to pupils' achievement. They feel more accountable, but said that they are being very well supported. You have ensured that good management systems are in place to help leaders, at all levels, assess pupils' achievement. Faculty leaders said that they have been well trained to meet the raised expectations of them. They feel listened to and valued.

During my last visit, I acknowledged that leaders of subject and teachers were becoming more skilled in evaluating and assessing pupils' work. This improvement has continued. All leaders and teachers confidently use the information that the school's good tracking system provides. Teachers are now assessing the quality of pupils' work more accurately. They are analysing information about their classes and using this information to inform their planning of lessons.

The leadership of teaching and learning continues to improve and, as a consequence, the quality of teaching across the school also continues to improve. Senior leaders know the strengths of teachers and use these to support the improvement in others. There is now a collaborative approach to improving teaching. You have created a culture where teachers are starting to have deep and meaningful discussions about how to improve their work. Teachers are confident to both give and receive advice.

Leaders and teachers are now much more analytical and reflective when evaluating

the effectiveness of what they do and the wider impact this has on the school. They are rightly proud of the improvements in pupils' behaviour. They recognise that there are also improvements to pupils' achievement, although leaders and teachers know that these improvements are not yet having a big impact on improving examination results. There is a consensus as to why this is: attendance has to improve; the good behaviour seen around the school has to be converted into stronger pupil drive to succeed, and teachers have to raise their expectations even further of what pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve.

As a result of visits to local primary schools, leaders in the English faculty are gaining a more detailed insight into the key stage 2 English curriculum and the standards reached by pupils. This is better informing their decisions about what to teach in key stage 3. Teachers are developing a better understanding of pupils' prior knowledge when they start in Year 7. Other heads of faculty demonstrate a desire to follow this initiative, believing it will help them ensure that pupils start learning well from the beginning of Year 7 and throughout key stage 3.

Leaders have ensured that all teachers understand that a successful school promotes good learning throughout all year groups. This has not always been the case at Kirkby High School. Previously, a considerable amount of effort was put into accelerating the progress of pupils in Year 11, while accepting much weaker progress throughout key stage 3. Teachers are now teaching much more effectively across all year groups. As one Year 10 pupil said, 'I wish I had had this good teaching from Year 7.' However, pupils currently in key stage 4 have a great deal of catching up to do. Leaders are successfully ensuring that strategies to accelerate achievement in key stage 4 are effective without compromising learning in key stage 3. Rates of progress for pupils in key stage 3 are much stronger than they were for the current Year 11 pupils.

The school's tracking information suggests that any differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of others, on the whole, are not significant. This represents an improvement and a positive response to the review the school commissioned into the effective use of the pupil premium.

The teaching of basic literacy skills is improving because leaders have quickly developed their understanding of how best to promote literacy across the school. This understanding is based on evaluating the impact of specialist work in the English department and the successful work that has been done with pupils in Years 7 and 8 who have weak literacy skills. Training for all staff on how to promote literacy has ensured that all subjects now focus on the promotion of pupils' speaking skills, requiring pupils to answer more challenging questions and understand key vocabulary. Teachers mark pupils' work constantly for errors in spelling, grammar and poor style. Leaders have a strategy to extend this work. They are clear about what they want to achieve and how they will measure success.

Your evaluations, and those of the trust, of the quality of the school's work are

accurate. You continue to refine whole-school improvement planning, which is of a good standard. It is clear which members of staff are responsible for each strand of improvement. Where possible, success is measured through impact on pupils' outcomes. Actions are timely, and there is a clear sense of urgency about the expected rates of improvement. Your strategy to delegate improvement planning to other senior and middle leaders is helping them to become more reflective about, and more accountable for, the impact of their work.

Governors continue to improve the impact they have on school improvement. They offer you and other leaders good challenge and support. Governors, too, are becoming much more evaluative about the quality of their work. As a result, they continue to refine and improve their systems and procedures.

You and other leaders receive very good support from the trust. You rightly have confidence in the quality of their guidance and so you are taking advantage of the wide range of experienced professionals available through the trust. You, leaders and teachers are making greater use of the opportunities to discuss and learn from other schools within the trust. Kirkby High teachers' confidence was boosted when they found colleagues from other schools learning from them during collaborative professional development sessions.

You have changed the curriculum at key stage 4 to make it more challenging and relevant to Kirkby High pupils. You have stopped pupils sitting examinations that were too easy for them and were of no real benefit to them. This decision will have a detrimental and possibly quite significantly negative effect on the school's published accountability measures. Despite this, you have made changes to what you believe to be in the best interests of the pupils, illustrating your principled approach to leadership and to education. A decision made two years ago, to enter the then-Year 10 pupils to sit their English literature examination early, will also negatively affect the published results for the current Year 11.

You have a clear view on how to drive up the quality of education at Kirkby High School even further. You said that much of your future work will be to continue to raise pupils' aspirations further and to support parents and carers to engage more effectively with their child's education.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teaching continues to improve. Teachers have a high regard for the leader with responsibility to promote high-quality teaching. Teachers said that any training and guidance they receive is valuable and makes a real difference to how effective they are in classrooms. The variability in quality is reducing as standards of teaching improve. The quality of teaching is improving quickly in modern foreign languages.

Teachers are aware that most-able pupils are the least successful group of learners. Teachers have raised their expectations of what these pupils should be able to

achieve. They are now earnestly trying to raise the achievement of the most able. Achievement is improving for this group of pupils, but not yet quickly enough.

The proportion of teachers who enable their pupils to achieve well is increasing. Where teaching is at least good or improving rapidly, teachers provide pupils with challenging and interesting learning activities. However, the proportion of teachers who are not yet fully engaging their pupils, enabling them to progress quickly, is still significant and capping overall rates of progress.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The considerable improvements to behaviour seen at my last visit have been maintained. The atmosphere around the school remains calm and sociable. Pupils respect the high expectations staff have of them and of the school's routines. Pupils said that rules are applied more strictly, but this makes the school a better place to be in. The school's leadership team deals with the rare incidents of serious misbehaviour very well.

In classrooms, there are signs of some pupils showing a real desire to learn, but, on the whole, pupils are compliant without stretching themselves. The strong contributions pupils make to the school being calm and safe are generally not transferring to positive attitudes to learning or driving achievement.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are reflected in their weak attendance. However, this has shown a recent improvement. Pupils have begun to respond to a wide range of initiatives encouraging them to improve their attendance. Over the last four weeks, although attendance was not close to what would be considered 'average', it was much nearer to it. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving more quickly than that of other pupils in the school. The punctuality of pupils arriving at school at the beginning of the day has improved significantly. Once in school, pupils move efficiently and are punctual to lessons.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Outcomes for pupils are improving, including in English and mathematics. Outcomes are improving more rapidly for younger pupils. The progress current Year 11 pupils are making is stronger than that of last year's cohort.

Across subjects, Year 11 pupils have a great deal to catch up if they are to make good progress. Over time however, younger pupils have experienced less weak teaching. This exposure to stronger teaching is ensuring that younger pupils are progressing more quickly than pupils currently in Year 11.

You have ensured that there are many strategies in place to support the current Year 11 pupils to catch up. You, leaders and teachers know that good pupil achievement is rooted in consistently strong teaching from Year 7. There is a will,

throughout the school, for there to be little need in the future for these strategies, which compensate for earlier weak teaching.

The identification of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is accurate. School tracking information highlights that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are not making the progress that is expected of them. Subject teachers, generally, have not adopted good strategies to support these pupils in their classrooms. However, those pupils who receive specialist support in the Inclusion Centre do well and flourish.

### **External support**

The school has received external support from specialist leaders in education. This support has focused on middle leadership development in physical education, humanities, science and computer science.