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30 April 2015

Mrs Annemari Ottridge  
Lonsdale School  
Brittain Way  
Stevenage  
Hertfordshire  
SG2 8UT

Dear Mrs Ottridge

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Lonsdale School**

Following my visit to your school on 28-29 April 2015, 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 October 2014. 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.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

- cc. Chair of the Governing Body
- cc. Local authority
- cc. The Secretary of State
- cc. The Education Funding Agency (EFA)

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2014**

- Improve teaching and raise pupils' achievements by ensuring that:
  - subject leaders and teachers have accurate information on the progress of pupil groups and use this to adjust their planning for pupils' learning and in reviewing the success of how different aspects of subjects are taught
  - staff, particularly in Key Stage 3, have the skills and subject knowledge to teach science to the same level as in other subjects, such as English and mathematics.
  
- Ensure that the school meets all statutory safeguarding requirements by making sure that:
  - the leadership and management of safeguarding are rigorous
  - all statutory policies and procedures are in place, up to date and fully implemented
  - all the required training is in place for staff and the designated child protection officer at the required intervals
  - the governing body oversees all safeguarding procedures and policies, and so carries out its statutory duties in respect of these effectively.
  
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - refining further the tracking and monitoring systems of pupils' progress so that all leaders and managers have a clear view of the progress made by the different groups of pupils in the school and adjust improvement planning to reflect this
  - ensuring all leaders and managers are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to safeguarding and child protection, and are held to account for these
  - developing a rigorous system for monitoring teaching, which involves subject leaders and other middle leaders.

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 second monitoring inspection on 28-29 April 2015**

### **Evidence**

During this monitoring inspection, a range of lessons were observed, including a number which were observed jointly with you, the acting deputy headteacher or the assistant headteachers. I met with you, the acting deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers and the newly appointed deputy headteacher. I also met with the head of sixth-form, the teacher responsible for looked-after children, the behaviour management coordinator and head of residential care. Meetings were also held with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

I scrutinised school documents, including records of leaders' monitoring, minutes from the governing body meetings and the Hertfordshire improvement partner's notes of visit. I met with a group of pupils, spoke to pupils in lessons and scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and assessment files. The single central record was checked and risk assessments reviewed.

### **Context**

Lonsdale School shares a building with the residential provision. Many students attend the school as well as the residential provision. This inspection related to the education provision. However, there are a number of overarching aspects of safeguarding which cover both. For example, the same senior leadership team has responsibility for both the residential and the school provision, and the school and residential provision share staff. Therefore, the single central record covers both the school and the residential staff. In addition, the school's policies frequently relate to both aspects of provision.

Since my last monitoring visit, you have appointed a new substantive deputy headteacher who will take up post in September and three new residential support workers. The acting assistant headteachers remain in post.

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

Students' progress and their attainment are not consistently good throughout the school or across all ability levels because of the inconsistent quality of teaching. School information relating to pupils' attainment and progress is not secure. This is because historic assessment has been identified as over generous and inaccurate. This means that the measurement of the progress pupils have made to date is difficult to ascertain. New baseline assessment has now been recorded for all current pupils so the picture going forward is an accurate one.

Where learning is at its best, pupils make good and at times outstanding progress. This was clearly seen during a lesson in a Key Stage 5 where pupils were learning

about living with a disability and their views were being challenged in a safe environment. The challenge included work with peers from the adjoining mainstream school. This ongoing project is seen as an example of good practice by leaders, but such good practice is not yet in place in all classes or lessons, or well enough shared among teachers.

Most pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 or 5 are well prepared to make decisions to take the next steps in their learning. The parents and carers of pupils leaving the schools are offered advice and guidance through support evenings and events. On these occasions, they are given information which helps them make informed decisions about the future opportunities for their child. As a consequence of this clear planning pupils move onto appropriate placements either in education or work.

Expectations of the quality of pupils' work have risen in some subjects and phases. For example, in Key Stage 3 English, pupils' files are well presented and pupils show pride in their work. The high expectations set by the teacher mean that the quality of English achievement evident within these files is consistently good and improving. Excellent modelling of sign language and spoken language which reinforce learning also allow pupils to make good progress in all aspects of their language and communication skills. However, these high expectations are not yet consistently applied across the school.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching is variable. Not enough is good enough to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress in all year groups. Teachers' planning does not ensure that all pupils are effectively challenged in their learning. This is because it too often highlights the activities which will be completed within the lesson rather than the learning which will take place. As a result, classrooms are busy, but not always focused upon learning. The assessment of pupils' learning over time is insufficient and lacks detail or depth of understanding. For example, in pupils' books and learning journals there is generally too little work or other evidence to support the assessments made. Work in files is sometimes not annotated to ensure that there is clear understanding of what support was necessary for the pupil to achieve the outcome. As a result, assessments have been inaccurate and next steps in learning are not always well identified for individual pupils.

Time is not always used effectively. The inspector observed some lessons where pupils were expected to wait for long periods of time before learning commenced, or where pupils waited for too long for others to take a turn or answer questions. As a result, in these instances, pupils made slower progress.

Learning support assistants are often used effectively by teachers. Alongside teaching staff their clear speech, use of sign language and other forms of communication ensure that pupils access learning activities at a level appropriate to

their needs. In some lessons, too much support means that students are not challenged to make learning their own or deepen their understanding of a concept or skill. As a result, they do not make the progress of which they are capable.

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

The behaviour of pupils is improving both in lessons and in less structured times. Pupils are well supported to access play at an appropriate level and social times are valued by all. Pupils are generally polite and respectful to staff and their peers. Many students show developing levels of independence that are appropriate to their abilities. Pupils cooperate well; they wait for staff to help or guide them. Occasionally, even when lessons do not challenge them enough or when their time is being wasted, they remain well behaved.

Relationships are excellent. As a result of the skilful matching of methods of communication to the needs of pupils, requests made by staff are nearly always responded to quickly. This good level of understanding of the needs of individuals contributes much to the progress that pupils make in their personal development.

The management of challenging behaviour has improved. Incidents, including the use of physical intervention, are now better recorded. However, the way leaders analyse if behaviours are repeated, or if there are reasons for setting off these poorer behaviours, is not sufficiently developed.

Detailed risk assessments are now in place for school trips and activities. Assessments are thorough, staff responsibilities clearly identified and actions which ensure the safety of pupils detailed.

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

The developing leadership team is enthusiastic and determined that the school will improve. Procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning are not robust enough to identify the gaps and tackle them quickly. For example, quality of teaching in early years has not been identified by leaders as a concern. Systems are now in place to check on the performance of teachers and are used effectively to set targets to improve performance; these systems are too new to be able to measure their success. Procedures are more robust: targets for this year have been reviewed once and monitoring of how well staff are meeting these targets has taken place. The school has also implemented similar systems to check the performance of learning support staff.

Leaders and governors have rightly reviewed a number of policies, for example those for behaviour management and safeguarding. These new policies are beginning to have a positive impact on how the school works. This can be best seen through the implementation of the new behaviour policy. Staff are now well trained

in defusing challenging behaviour and intervening at an early stage of any concern. As a result, the number of incidents requiring physical intervention has decreased.

The school has started to improve the range of its curriculum. Students in the current Year 10 cohort are the first to be offered GCSE qualifications. This has raised students' aspirations. Consequently the school is already having success with the reintegration of pupils into local mainstream school and in planning for the future of pupils. Appropriate use is being made of guidance and support to ensure that pupils make positive choices about the next steps in their education when they leave the school. The planned transition of pupils out of the school means that the majority of pupils move successfully to their next stage of education or training, with appropriate support.

Governors are now more secure in their understanding of school data and recent governing body minutes show that they are better equipped to challenge the information school leaders present to them. They have increased the number of visits made to the school but have not yet identified the monitoring focus for their visits specifically enough.

Leaders and governors have not yet revisited their vision for the school and as a result there is some lack of shared understanding among staff about what the school considers most important and where it is heading next.

### **External support**

The local authority continues to provide appropriate support and challenge to the school through regular monitoring meetings relating to the issues for the school and for the residential care. So far meetings have been separate. The local authority now plans to combine these meetings to ensure they have a clear and accurate understanding of provision across the site and to reduce the duplication of actions. The local authority has taken timely action to address the issues identified relating to the safeguarding of pupils. Advisers are now confident the school's safeguarding procedures are appropriate.