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5 November 2010

Ms Ruth Martin
Headteacher
The Royal Docks Community School
Prince Regent Lane
Custom House
London
E16 3HS

Dear Ms Martin

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Royal Docks Community School

Following my visit with Paul Dowgill, Ann Sydney and Mick Pye, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 20 and 21 October 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2009. 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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 Newham.

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2009

- Raise standards and achievement by ensuring realistic but challenging targets are used effectively by all staff to secure rapid improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching and students' progress by ensuring teachers consistently:
 - use a range of activities which challenge and motivate, and meet the needs of all students
 - provide students with clear information on how well they are achieving and what they need to improve.
- Improve the quality and impact of monitoring and evaluation and improvement planning undertaken by managers and governors.

Special measures: monitoring of The Royal Docks Community School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 October 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents including the school's self-evaluation and attainment data, met with the headteacher, groups of students, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Just under 20% of teaching staff left the school in July 2010. Many have been replaced by temporary staff.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Students' success in national examinations in 2010 was similar to the previous year. School leaders noted that the results were disappointing and were not in line with the school's own assessment of students' attainment in some subjects. The proportion of students who gained five or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English equalled those seen in 2010. Students' attainment in mathematics rose whilst their attainment in English declined. Attainment remains low. Students for whom English is not their first language attained better than their peers. Inspectors observed that the progress that students make in lessons is at least satisfactory, although this was not the case for Year 11 students in 2010. Whilst targets are set for students' attainment in individual subjects, these are not always reflective of students' ability. The stronger lessons enabled students to work at a good pace, in groups and in pairs. They were given good opportunities to assess their own learning and they enjoyed the challenge of the lessons where teachers enabled them to work on a variety of stimulating tasks. In these lessons students' learning proceeds at an appropriate pace, students understand their objectives and they respond well to teachers' questions. Only half of the lessons seen were this successful. Poor planning of some lessons results in teachers not meeting the needs of all students. Inspectors saw instances where students were not challenged in their learning which resulted in them becoming restless.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise standards and achievement by ensuring realistic but challenging targets are used effectively by all staff to secure rapid improvement – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students have noticed that behaviour is improving and that there are good strategies to enable them to be rewarded for good behaviour and attendance. The level of students' attendance at the end of last year was satisfactory, although it is

showing signs of improvement in this current year. Students know who to turn to when they need support. They have started to contribute to the development of the school through various councils. Their voice continues to be developed to enable them to make better contribution to the quality of provision.

The effectiveness of provision

In half the lessons observed by inspectors, the quality of teaching was good. This does not equate to the school's view, which is slightly higher. The overall quality of teaching is similar to that seen at the previous monitoring visit. Given the significant staff changes over the summer, the school has worked well to maintain the level of good quality lessons. Where teaching is stronger, teachers use a range of active learning activities, such as students leading elements of a lesson including presenting to the class and asking students questions. In these lessons assessment criteria are shared with students so that they understand what is required of them. In the weaker lessons, there was little evidence that work was planned effectively to meet the differing needs of students. Some less able students struggled with their work and more able students were not always challenged in their learning. Teachers are not routinely using assessment data effectively to support the planning of learning activities for the differing needs of students in their class. In these lessons, attainment targets are not referred to or used to support and challenge students. Some teachers are focusing on their planning and not the expected learning of the students.

There are many sound initiatives that are now in place to improve the curriculum. In response to the differing needs of students in Key Stage 4, there is an increased breadth of vocational qualifications that better equip them for the world of work. In response to disappointing science GCSE results, a vocational qualification in science has been introduced to enable less able students to make faster progress in this subject.

The school provides effective pastoral care and students with profound or moderate learning difficulties are well included in the life of the school. The good support for these students has resulted in improved attendance for many since leaving their primary schools. There is some sensitive teaching assistant support in lessons that meets students' needs well. There is good supervision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and this has led to improved behaviour. Although students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported, attainment targets for many students are not challenging enough to enable them to close the gap in attainment at the end of Year 11. There is insufficient tracking of groups to evaluate the effectiveness of the support the school provides.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and students' progress by ensuring teachers consistently:

- use a range of activities which challenge and motivate, and meet the needs of all students
- provide students with clear information on how well they are achieving and what they need to improve – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and managers have acted swiftly to analyse the school's 2010 results and put in place pertinent actions to improve some subjects' performance. There is an increased level of accountability at subject leader level. At the last monitoring visit the focus on teaching was starting to impact on students' achievement and senior leaders have implemented effective strategies for improving lessons that are judged to be satisfactory or less. Some of these initiatives are showing good impact especially on students' attainment at Key Stage 3. There is increased participation by teachers in professional development initiatives. The monitoring of lessons is providing leaders with a more accurate assessment of lesson quality, although it is yet to significantly improve the proportion of good or better lessons. The inconsistencies in marking and addressing the differing students' needs are yet to be eradicated. There is good practice in some subjects that is yet to permeate through the rest of the school. Leaders continue to improve the consistencies in the capacity in the middle leadership and effective training and support are in place. However, more work needs to be done to ensure that there is a culture of rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation that leads to sustained improvement, especially in light of the recent decline of results in some subjects. Senior leaders' scrutiny of middle leaders work is regularly undertaken, although the level of detail and rigour needs to be increased. The school has revised its self-evaluation which is an accurate assessment of some areas of its performance. However, the school needs to closely review the impact of some actions implemented to raise standards and to improve the quality of provision overall.

The governing body recognises that its level of scrutiny of the school's work is not yet sharp enough. There has been the introduction of the role of governors who will be linked to subjects. Training to undertake these roles is planned shortly.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality and impact of monitoring and evaluation and improvement planning undertaken by managers and governors – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has streamlined the support given to the school. This measured assistance is supporting leaders well in science and English, two areas that did not perform in line with managers' prediction. The executive headteacher provides effective support which is enabling the school to further build appropriate capacity at middle leadership level.