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30 June 2011

Mr Robert Preston
The Executive Headteacher
The Misbourne School
Misbourne Drive
Great Missenden
Buckinghamshire
HP16 0BN

Dear Mr Preston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Misbourne School

Following my visit with Miranda Perry and Graham Saltmarsh, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 28 and 29 June 2011, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are 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 – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

The school may appoint a newly qualified teacher to the applied business department.

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

- Raise attainment, particularly in the core subjects of English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment information to plan carefully for the needs of all learners
 - planning and implementing effective strategies for students who have fallen behind in their learning
 - ensuring that all staff have the highest expectations of what students can achieve.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels have a clear and shared understanding of how to take the school forward by:
 - clarifying everyone's roles and responsibilities
 - making self-evaluation procedures more rigorous
 - evaluating the impact of initiatives on different groups of students.

Special measures: monitoring of The Misbourne School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and other staff, a member of the interim executive board, four groups of students, two advisers from the local authority and a few parents.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the permanent headteacher left the school at the end of the first week in June 2011. The post was filled immediately by the part-time consultant headteacher who had been working in the school for one month. The interim executive headteacher will hold the position for at least one year. Two consultant headteachers are in post, one full time and the second part time. One member of the senior leadership team left the school at Easter and the second has temporarily stepped down from his position. A few teachers will be leaving at the end of the current term.

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

The school's assessment data indicate that Year 11 students are expected to achieve better results in the GCSE examinations as the proportion obtaining five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, improved. Although the results are expected to be better than the previous year, the school does not expect to reach the higher target based on students' starting points. Students are however beginning to make better progress because of the intense use of intervention work including coaching and mentoring across the curriculum. Teachers are increasingly making better use of assessment data in Key Stage 4 to identify students who are at risk of falling behind or who might not achieve a high GCSE grade in English and mathematics. This early identification of students is increasing teachers' awareness of tailoring support to meet the needs of individuals and groups. However, while support is available at Key Stage 4, similar intervention has now started for students at Key Stage 3.

In lessons observed, students made satisfactory progress overall. The school's assessment data confirm that students are beginning to make better progress. Students also say that they are doing better because the teaching has improved. Nevertheless, based on their starting points, students could still make better progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making much slower progress than their peers, primarily as provision for them has not been adequate over time.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, further developments have taken place to improve assessment to support learning. The new marking system and tracking data are more accurate and reliable. As a result, the school is in a better position to identify the rate of students' progress. Expectations of what students can achieve are improving but a few students spoken to feel that the targets are unrealistic and not matched to their needs. Additionally, both parents and students say that assessment is not used rigorously for setting, resulting in a few students being placed in a lower ability set.

Progress since the last monitoring visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment, particularly in the core subjects of English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students have expressed concerns about the school's decline and the length of time it has taken to begin the improvements. However, they are beginning to speak positively about their school and recognise that the recent changes in June have increased morale among the staff and the student population. In discussions, students referred to tangible examples of improvement, such as the learning environment, behaviour and teaching. They see the school as a corporate community and say that 'the school is on the up' and 'we can do it'. Their maturity and astute comments highlight their wish to see rapid improvement because the students are keen to achieve well. Students are beginning to find a voice through the recently revived school council.

Students say they feel safe and are assured by the increasing presence of the staff around the site. There has been a significant improvement in behaviour since the last monitoring inspection, particularly in lessons. Whilst older students say that systems for controlling unacceptable behaviour are better, younger students remain unconvinced that the room used for internal exclusions is effective. Discussions with students indicate that bullying and any disruption in lessons are dealt with quickly.

Attendance since the last monitoring inspection has fallen and is just below the national average. Far more attention has been given to increasing students' punctuality, but the school recognises there is still more to do in stressing its importance, particularly to lessons.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last monitoring inspection and is now satisfactory overall. Although teachers have been exposed to good practice including internal coaching, monitoring and feedback, as well as working with the partnership school, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain within departments and

across the school. There is, however, more awareness that the features of good teaching should underpin every lesson to help students make faster progress.

In the lessons seen, students made faster progress when structured planning included clear aims and learning outcomes that they understood because they were clearly explained and linked to the resources and set tasks. In these lessons, teachers skilfully built on students' skills in a seamless way by increasing the difficulty of the set work gradually so that new concepts were readily understood. This was possible because first, assessment information was used very well to meet students' needs. Assessment was also used effectively when teachers intervened in a timely way and asked a range of questions to assess their grasp of the work. This provided opportunities for the teachers to deal with misconceptions. Second, practical approaches enabled students to apply and practise the taught skills. Third, whole class teaching, group work and independent learning were promoted to generate discussion, feedback and self-assessment. Fourth, pace was quick and summaries at the end of lessons were used well to consolidate learning and identify gaps in students' knowledge.

In lessons where the teaching was only satisfactory, expectations of work were not spelt out or challenging and a few students used their state of confusion to delay beginning their work. Planning did not meet the needs of all students. This resulted in a slower pace of learning because the more able students were expected to wait for others to catch up. Learning was not consolidated well throughout the lesson or at the end. Group work masked the skills of individuals to develop their thinking and answer questions and, because the targets were not challenging, efforts were mediocre.

The new marking system is focused on encouraging students to respond to the written comments on their work, but too many do not give a response to demonstrate that they understand how they can improve their work. The school's reviews on the quality of marking show that, although there are significant improvements, there is not a systematic approach to developing presentation and marking with challenging comments.

The curriculum is under review and, at this stage, Year 9 students are given opportunities to begin GCSE courses early. Older students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form appreciate the diverse range of subjects. In particular, the sixth formers are offered a range of vocational courses. The school's specialisms are beginning to impact on other subject areas through sharing good assessment practices.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has emerged from a difficult period when its progress in making improvement was hindered because of internal tensions and inertia. As a result, much time was lost and the plans for improvement and developing the school's

capacity were not implemented adequately. Until the executive headteacher took up the interim post, there was a lack of clarity about how to drive improvement. For example, the interim executive board did not have a clear brief about how to move the school forward and actions to develop partnership work with the outstanding partner school were not expedited. Despite the lack of strategic planning, the consultant headteachers, brought in by the local authority to strengthen the leadership team, worked on assigned tasks. A few key subject leaders have continued to use their initiative to accelerate students' progress.

The executive headteacher has won the respect and trust of students, staff and parents primarily as he has consulted all stakeholders and acted very quickly and decisively to initiate tangible changes. This has led to a significant improvement in morale at all levels, including parents, and the belief that provision can improve. Priorities have been identified and the principles of working towards improving the effectiveness of the school have been established and accepted. For example, protocols for working with partners for the benefit of the school have been clarified and the partnership work with the outstanding school is gradually helping to bring about improvement. A sound start has been made to conveying to staff, parents and students the vision for improvement through meetings and discussions. Roles and responsibilities are also being clarified. Previous complacency about students' progress is being eroded and replaced with an improving understanding of what is required to secure improvement.

The executive headteacher is well supported by the senior team but, at this stage, there is recognition that there is still much more to do in relation to developing the leadership skills of all leaders because the capacity for further improvement is too variable. Urgent action has therefore been taken to begin addressing shortcomings. Within a very short time a report to identify key leaders has been commissioned and completed in preparation for the next steps to developing their management skills.

Steps to restructure the school are about to begin and this is underpinned by consultation. Additionally, variability in the effectiveness of different departments has been identified and a start has been made to begin tackling underlying weaknesses. For example, over the last two school years, there has been a lack of guidance and support to develop provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Similarly, attention has not been given to students learning English as an additional language.

The interim executive board is supportive but recognises that the school still has a lot to do. There is an understanding of what has to be done to move the school forward. But, at this stage, it has yet to develop a strategic plan that is owned by all leaders and staff. Safeguarding requirements are met.

Progress since the last monitoring visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that leaders and managers at all levels have a clear and shared understanding of how to take the school forward – satisfactory.

External support

The statement of action produced by the local authority has been amended and meets all requirements. The local authority is providing a diverse range of support, carefully created to meet the needs of the school. For example, the strategy board ratifies and monitors decisions. The local authority has continued to support the school by giving extra resources, including consultant staff monitoring lessons with some of the school's leaders to ensure accuracy of judgements. This is leading to improvement in teaching. However, the steps taken to secure foundations in order to develop more robust systems for holding the school to account, and to demonstrate improvement over time, are only now in place because the leadership has been dealing with a number of barriers to improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on the whole school community and external support around a shared understanding of what needs to be done and clearly identify the different responsibilities individuals and groups are to take to achieve this.
- Build on setting up effective systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the senior and middle leadership teams and the school's progress towards its targets by focusing on the impact of actions on outcomes for students.