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6 October 2011

Mr A Stainton
Headteacher
Cheshunt School
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Cheshunt
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Dear Mr Stainton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Cheshunt School

Following my visit with Peter Dacombe, additional inspector, to your school on 4 October 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 on 24 November 2010. 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 Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2010

- Raise achievement as a matter of urgency by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use the available information on students' prior attainment and individual targets to plan lessons that provide an appropriate level of challenge for each student in the class
 - ensuring that intervention programmes tackle all forms of underachievement, including that of the most-able students and students with special educational needs but without a statement
 - improving attendance, so that all students maximise their learning time.

- Within a year, improve the quality of teaching to ensure that each student experiences a coherent programme of learning from Year 7 to Year 11 by:
 - improving the organisation and planning of programmes of study within subjects
 - ensuring that all teachers have a good level of subject knowledge and can use a range of teaching approaches that give students an active role in their learning and promote good behaviour
 - improving teachers' skills in assessing students' levels of understanding during the course of a lesson, so they can adapt their teaching approaches accordingly.

- Increase the pace of school improvement by:
 - using a wider range of performance indicators to set improvement targets and to monitor progress towards achieving them
 - involving a wider range of stakeholders in rigorous self-evaluation
 - ensuring that staff at all levels are held to account by their line managers and that senior leaders are held to account for the school's performance by the governing body
 - meeting the school's statutory duties in relation to equality.

Special measures: monitoring of Cheshunt School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 4 October 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, the school's attendance officer, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

A deputy headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term to take up a headship. The new deputy headteacher took up post in September 2011 as did a new head of English, a teacher to be second-in-charge of English and a teacher to be second-in-charge of mathematics. Ten other teachers joined the school at the start of the school year; who teach in English, mathematics, science, music and drama.

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

The unvalidated results of the 2011 public examinations show some improvement. At 73%, the proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSEs is likely to be close to the national figure. Similarly, the proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSE, including English and mathematics, improved to 46% and was above the government's current targets for secondary schools. The average points scored by students in their best eight examination results rose significantly and is likely to be close to the national average. However, the percentage of pupils making the expected progress in English and mathematics varied significantly. Outcomes in English declined, with only 52% of students making the expected progress. However, results in mathematics improved significantly to 62%, a position very close to the government's current target for secondary schools.

Progress in lessons shows some improvement but remains variable; good progress was evident in nearly half the lessons observed. Students made outstanding progress in an excellent Year 10 geography lesson because of the quality of the learning resources provided and the dynamic question and answer dialogue maintained by the teacher. Students responded very well to the academically demanding material provided. Similarly, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, students made good progress when studying vectors because of the outstanding explanations provided by one member of the class. The teacher managed these contributions very effectively and the students rose to the challenge provided.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection.

- Raise achievement as a matter of urgency – **satisfactory**.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance remains an issue. The final figures for the 2010–11 academic year continued to decline and were lower than in previous years. The current Year 11 average attendance for the previous academic year was only 89%.

Exclusions have been reduced significantly and behaviour around the school was satisfactory and often good. Greater involvement by senior staff, an internal isolation room, behaviour contracts negotiated with students and their parents and carers, and increased staff presence in public areas have made an important contribution. Punctuality to school has improved since the last inspection and there is some evidence that the new attendance and punctuality monitoring arrangements introduced this term are beginning to have effect. As it is too early to measure the impact of these arrangements accurately, HMI will review the matter in detail as part of the spring term monitoring visit.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection.

- Improve attendance, so that all students maximise their learning time – **inadequate**.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remains variable but is beginning to show improvement. The significant staff turnover in the English and mathematics departments has improved lesson planning. Staff who taught two of the weaker lessons observed in these departments on the first day of the inspection were seen again on the second day and both teachers produced strong performances following professional feedback offered by the inspection team.

Outstanding teaching was observed in geography, English, mathematics and drama. In the best lessons, the pace of learning and the teachers' high expectations was evident from the outset and students responded positively. In these lessons, good use was made of imaginative resources and assessment opportunities were used effectively to structure the next phase of learning. In an outstanding Year 11 drama lesson, the use of time was precise and the focus of learning driven forward by insightful questioning. Peer assessment was used very well and a 'hot seating' exercise, sensitively managed, had the students spellbound.

The weaknesses in teaching that remain relate to ineffectual behaviour management, low level tasks, such as creating a poster, that are given far too much time, and assessment for learning tasks that only sample pupil opinion and do not inform the next part of the lesson.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection.

- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that each student experiences a coherent programme of learning from Year 7 to Year 11 – **satisfactory**.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The senior team has developed significant insight into the core issues faced by the school. Important steps have been taken to improve teaching and, quite recently, to address the weaknesses in attendance. The leadership team is better balanced than previously and self-evaluation is accurate. In a discussion regarding the impact of the new school inspection proposals recently released by Ofsted, senior staff were very aware of the need to be able to demonstrate student progress in all subjects and for subject leaders to take responsibility for the quality of teaching and achievement in their area. Senior staff joined inspectors in the observation of teaching and the views they expressed concurred with the judgements made by inspectors.

A number of new curriculum developments have been introduced, including many within the school's technology specialist area towards vocational qualifications offered in Years 8 to 10. These Level 1 and 2 qualifications have the potential to improve key skills and build student confidence.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection.

- Increase the pace of school improvement – **satisfactory**.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support with a range of consultants and advisory staff deployed effectively by an experienced School Improvement Partner. Appropriate links have been established with high performing schools and specialist units.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the school's assessment database provides robust evidence of student progress.