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Mrs Lynda Strodder
Headteacher
The Mark Way School
Batchelors Barn Road
Andover
Hampshire
SP10 1HR

Dear Mrs Strodder

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Mark Way School

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 November 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 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 the 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 Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Helen Barter
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - implementing the agreed interim management structure, with clear roles and responsibilities being understood by the team
 - establishing rigorous and robust systems to monitor all aspects of provision
 - improving governance through developing the management skills needed to hold the school to account.

- Improve students' progress by:
 - developing and implementing strategies to manage consistently students' behaviour
 - promoting good attendance through the development and implementation of effective strategies
 - developing and implementing effective systems to set targets which challenge students and give a clear picture of their progress.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers' planning clearly identifies the needs of students and how these will be met in every lesson
 - making sure that feedback to students tells them what they need to do to improve their work and reach the next level or grade.

Special measures: monitoring of The Mark Way School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 November 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, visited 11 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, senior leaders and other staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and two members, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

The second interim headteacher left at the end of the summer term. A third interim headteacher from within the local authority has been leading the school from the start of the autumn term 2011 and is contracted to the role for the whole of the academic year. The governing body has begun the fourth process for appointing a substantive headteacher with interviews scheduled to commence in January 2012. The roles and responsibilities of the personnel in the senior leadership team have been redefined. One teacher has left the school and one new teacher has joined. There are two vacancies for parent governors on the governing body.

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

The school fully acknowledges that there is considerable work to do to improve the rate of students' learning. The current available information about students' progress is inaccurate and being treated with caution, but the overall picture shows that the majority of students are underperforming in nearly all subjects. The school has rightly placed high priority on improving students' reading skills, introducing a morning reading session and guided reading training for staff.

The school has now begun to address the many legacy issues relating to the assessment of students' progress. The headteacher is quickly developing rigorous systems to track students' progress, to set targets and to hold teachers to account for the quality of students' learning at the forthcoming student progress review meetings. The school recognises that adjustments to students' individual education plans will be necessary when their learning needs are better understood.

Students' engagement in lessons is showing signs of improvement because work is better matched to their needs. Year 9 students enthusiastically used their knowledge of French vocabulary to speak sentences, such as 'J'aime les raisins'. Students in Year 8 worked effectively on sequencing in a mathematics lesson because expectations for their learning had been clearly set out for them. Year 10 students enjoyed opportunities to work together, measuring each other's heights in mathematics and writing dialogue together having seen a film clip in an English lesson.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour has improved since the last monitoring inspection, with no exclusions in the first half of the autumn term. The school has introduced a new age-appropriate code of conduct and robust strategies to improve behaviour. These are clearly understood by students because they are consistently implemented by staff. Students know that inappropriate behaviour will lead to clearly staged sanctions but respond very positively to the ability to regain 'time' if behaviour improves quickly. The four-point award system which recognises good behaviour and students' engagement in learning is proving to be effective in making the school a more calm and purposeful learning environment. Learning support assistants can better focus on helping students with their work rather than spending time dealing with behaviour difficulties in the classroom or the corridors. During this monitoring inspection, some incidences of disruptive behaviour were observed in lessons where work set was not matched appropriately to students' needs and classroom management was weak. These incidences were in the minority, however, and students generally behaved well in the majority of lessons seen. The behaviour of Year 9 students during a visit to the local fire station was exemplary.

The school's strategies for improving attendance continue to bring about improvement. Attendance has increased from 92% overall last year to 93.4% for the first half of the autumn term. About one third of students have 100% attendance records. Appropriate agencies and SHIP (School Home Integrated Partnerships) workers are involved with those whose attendance gives cause for concern.

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

- Improve students' progress – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The headteacher is taking robust action to improve the quality of teaching through a programme of lesson observations with formal feedback, and following this monitoring inspection with staff performance management and student progress reviews. The newness of this programme means that its impact so far on improving the quality of teaching and students' progress is limited. Of the 11 lessons observed, teaching was good in five, satisfactory in three and inadequate in three. The quality of teaching overall is still too variable and some teachers are inconsistent in their performance, sometimes delivering lessons which are of poorer quality than is normally expected of them. Classroom management and organisation are the key weaknesses which hamper students' learning. Students become frustrated with activities they do not understand, when they are left without help when they need it or the work is not matched to their ability. Their behaviour deteriorates as a result.

Where teaching is stronger, there are higher expectations for students' learning. Lessons proceed at a faster pace and there is a 'buzz' of enthusiasm as students strive to complete their work, with increasing independence. Ongoing moderation of work and displays of the National Curriculum levels in each classroom are helping teachers to better understand the levels at which students are working. As a result, more lessons are matched to students' level of ability, and expectations of what students can achieve are beginning to improve. The four-point award system at the end of each lesson – enabled through the increase in lesson time to one hour – encourages students to assess for themselves how well they have met the learning objectives and to show they know at what level they are working. Students have taken to this system well and their engagement in learning is much better as a result. Improved feedback through more regular marking in books helps students to understand what they need to do next to improve.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher is realistic about the school's current effectiveness and is acting with impressive determination to put the school on a firm footing for the future. She has quickly identified the most important next steps for improvement in the new Raising Attainment Plan, with the aim of raising students' achievement right at its heart. However, it is not possible to set accurate targets and milestones for success until securely accurate data are obtained about students' progress.

Through the redefinition of the senior leaders' roles and responsibilities, the headteacher gives a strong message that there is shared accountability for improvement across the school. While outcomes in terms of students' achievements are still limited, senior leaders speak highly of the guidance given to them by the headteacher to develop their professional skills and knowledge and to build their capacity as effective leaders and managers. The headteacher is a strong and influential role model for all staff. Staff say that morale is good because they are already seeing the impact of the rigorous and consistent systems and procedures introduced, particularly that the school now feels like a place for learning.

The strong expertise on the governing body contributes to the improving leadership and management. Regular meetings and visits to lessons are firmly focused on monitoring the effectiveness of actions taken to improve provision and the impact these have on raising achievement. The headteacher works closely with the governing body, which appreciates the information that it now receives to support its decision making and to enable it to ask the right questions, for example how well the school is improving students' reading skills.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management – good

External support

The local authority continues to conduct thorough monitoring visits which have accurately assessed the school's progress and helped to identify the next important steps for improvement. Revisions have been made to the local authority statement of action but targets for students' outcomes require revision once accurate data are secured about their progress. The local authority has supported the school well in securing a strong and experienced headteacher for the interim leadership arrangements. It continues to give good support to the governing body during this current recruitment period for a substantive headteacher from September 2012.