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Mr Colin Belford
Headteacher
Archway School
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GL5 4AX

Dear Mr Belford

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Archway School

Following my visit with Howard Dodd and Sally Hall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 8 and 9 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise students' attainment in all subjects to meet or exceed national levels, both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

- Improve the proportion of good or better teaching across the school by ensuring that:
 - monitoring and evaluation focus on the contribution that teaching makes to students' learning, and evaluate clearly the progress made by different groups of students
 - the resulting assessment information is used to plan work that is well matched to all students' individual needs
 - effective questioning and dialogue are used to stimulate students' active participation in all lessons, with more opportunities for students to contribute their ideas to drive the learning forward
 - marking is much more detailed and gives students clear advice so that they know how to improve their work.

- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels on raising achievement by:
 - assiduously monitoring and using assessment information on different student groups to ensure that learning opportunities fully meet their needs
 - ensuring that assessment information is accurate in all subjects so that staff are clear about the capabilities of each student
 - ensuring that teachers make the most of learning opportunities within their subjects to reinforce literacy and numeracy across the school.

- Ensure that the governing body holds all leaders and managers to account by:
 - receiving regular, accurate information on the performance of different groups of students
 - rigorously monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision for all students, especially boys and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Special measures: monitoring of Archway School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 November 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 24 lessons, conducted a learning walk with the headteacher briefly visiting eight lessons, and scrutinised documents. They met with the headteacher, a range of staff, representative groups of students, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

A deputy headteacher retired at the end of the summer term and has been replaced by an external appointment. A new special educational needs coordinator has been appointed. One governor has left the governing body since the previous inspection and there remain two staff governor vacancies.

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

There was a marked improvement in the percentage of Year 11 students attaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics this summer. Attainment against this measure rose by 15 percentage points. There was some closing of the attainment gap between boys and girls, but the difference remains far bigger than that seen nationally. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities showed some improvement, although the progress of those identified as being at 'school action' remains below expected levels.

There was a large rise in the percentage of students attaining A* to C grades in mathematics. Students made satisfactory progress in this subject. Although the percentage of students attaining at least a C grade in English rose, overall attainment in this subject remained broadly similar to that seen last year. The progress made by students in English remains well below expected levels, particularly for lower-attaining boys and higher-attaining boys and girls. Although attainment rose in some other subjects such as science and information and communication technology (ICT) this summer, there was not a consistent pattern of improvement across the curriculum. There remains variation in students' achievement between different subjects.

There was a small rise in students' attainment at the end of Year 12 and Year 13 this summer. However, attainment remains below the national average. Although the percentage of Year 12 students failing to pass their AS examinations slightly declined, the percentage remains too high and well above that seen nationally. This was particularly true in psychology, business studies, mathematics, health and social

care, and ICT. The percentage of students who start courses in Year 12 and choose to continue studying them in Year 13 is increasing, but again this figure remains below the national average.

Judgement

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise students' attainment in all subjects to meet or exceed national levels, both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students take pride in their school and talk confidently about the improvements being made. They enjoy school and the attendance of students in Years 7 to 11 is steadily improving. The action being taken by leaders to improve sixth form students' attendance is also beginning to have a positive impact. Teachers apply behaviour-for-learning strategies consistently across the school, resulting in students having a clear understanding of what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and learning attitudes. Students behaved well in the large majority of lessons seen and they behaved sensibly around the school site. Students feel safe and they are confident that they know where to go to get help if they need it for either academic work or personal issues.

The effectiveness of provision

Robust monitoring of teaching linked with effective professional development has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching across the school. The percentage of lessons in which teaching is good or better has increased since the previous monitoring inspection. This improvement in teaching is beginning to have a positive impact on the progress made by students. Lessons are now routinely planned around clear learning outcomes. These are pitched at different levels to reflect the needs of all students in the class. These intended learning outcomes are shared with students at the start of the lesson to focus their learning and in the best lessons effectively referred to at the end to assess students' progress. Students in the main school and the sixth form state that the use of these lesson outcomes is aiding their learning. In the better lessons observed, teachers ensured that tasks and activities were well matched to the ability of students in the class, enabling them to reach these learning outcomes. However, this good practice is not yet consistently in place across the school, with some lessons lacking challenge for more able students or not providing sufficient support for lower-attaining students or those who have specific learning needs. Teachers have good subject knowledge and provide clear, helpful explanations to students that aid their learning. These explanations are often well supported by the effective use of resources and new technologies. Better use is being made of targeted questioning by teachers to check and develop students' learning. Teachers are also using a greater variety of teaching strategies to actively

engage students in learning, with fewer lessons being reliant on the teacher talking for an extended period of time. Although students are being provided with more opportunities to develop their independent learning skills, senior leaders rightly identify that this remains an area in need of further improvement.

The quality of marking of students' work is improving. Most teachers make effective use of formative 'how to improve' comments to provide clear and helpful advice to students. However, this good practice is not yet consistently in place across the school.

The new special educational needs coordinator has taken quick and effective action to raise the profile of support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, more detailed support plans for these students have been produced and shared with teachers. While these are beginning to help teachers plan lessons that better meet their learning needs, this good practice is not yet consistent across the school. The role of learning support assistants is also being sensibly developed so that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive more personalised support. Systems to more clearly track the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities remain at an early stage of development. As a result, it is not yet possible for the special educational needs coordinator to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions used to improve the progress made by these students.

The curriculum in the main school and the sixth form is being developed well so that it better meets the needs and interests of students. Changes made to the Key Stage 4 curriculum had a positive impact on students' attainment this summer. Further sensible changes have been made to the curriculum for current Year 11 students. Opportunities for students to practise and improve their literacy skills in a range of subjects are being satisfactorily developed. Good plans are in place to further enhance these opportunities.

Judgement

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the proportion of good or better teaching across the school – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher, with the support of senior leaders, has effectively raised the expectations of both staff and students. Staff are clearer about their responsibility to raise students' achievement and are committed to this endeavour. Systems to monitor and evaluate provision and students' outcomes continue to develop well and subject leaders are being held increasingly accountable for students' progress through line management meetings. The accuracy of teachers' assessment of

students' attainment continues to improve but at present is more accurate in the main school than in the sixth form. A central system to track the progress of individual and groups of students has been developed well. Underachieving students are now quickly identified and provided with increasingly effective support. These actions are beginning to close the achievement gap between subjects and groups of students. However, school leaders rightly acknowledge that these improvements need to be embedded, with a continued focus on narrowing these achievement gaps.

The school's raising achievement plan is well focused on suitable priorities and success criteria and milestones are sufficiently sharp, measurable and focused on student outcomes. The plan is effectively driving improvement and is being well monitored and evaluated. As a result, actions are being refined in order to improve their impact.

The governing body is fully committed to equality of opportunity and to ensuring that all groups of students are provided with the best possible opportunities to make the most of their talents. Members of the governing body have continued to improve their monitoring of the quality of school provision and students' outcomes through its effective committee structure and through well-focused visits to subject areas. As a result, the governing body has become better informed about the progress of different groups of students and is increasingly providing the school with an effective level of challenge as well as support.

Judgement

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels on raising achievement – good.
- Ensure that the governing body holds all leaders and managers to account – good.

External support

The school and the local authority continue to work well together to address the issues raised by the inspection in December last year. The local authority is monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's actions and its support well through a 'project group' that contains representatives from the local authority, school leadership team and governing body. The local authority has provided and commissioned some effective support for teaching since the last monitoring inspection.