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24 November 2011

Mrs A Schofield
Principal
Manchester Federation of ESB D Schools
c/o 200 Yew Tree Lane
Northen Moor
Manchester
M23 0FF

Dear Mrs Schofield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Southern Cross School

Following my visit to your school on the 22 and 23 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2011. 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

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

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 Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett

Her Majesty's Inspector

September 2011



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on June 2011

- Improve students' achievement by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve
 - ensuring assessment systems are comprehensive, focus on learning and provide continuity in learning between key stages
 - extending good practice of the new Key Stage 4 performance tracking system to the whole school
 - ensuring the school monitors the performance of different groups of students accurately and takes effective action to secure improvements where necessary
 - ensuring realistic and challenging targets are set for individual students.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring all teaching staff have the necessary subject skills and training
 - focusing more closely in lesson plans on what pupils are to learn
 - assessing students' previous learning to build progress more effectively.

- Raise attendance by:
 - improving tracking and monitoring systems to include those groups and their parents and carers that are hardest to reach
 - tailoring the curriculum to provide individual programmes which engage the interests, needs and aspirations of all students
 - using information from the analyses of trends and patterns in attendance to ensure an attendance rate at both key stages of at least 85%.

- Strengthen the school's leadership, management and capacity for sustained improvement by:
 - developing leaders' skills of monitoring and evaluating all aspects of school performance so that they are able to manage school improvement successfully
 - ensuring members of the interim executive board rigorously challenge senior managers and leaders and hold them to account for improving students' outcomes
 - taking prompt action to ensure identified priorities are tackled.

- Improve the school's safeguarding practices by:
 - ensuring robust monitoring and care for the welfare of students who are not attending school, those who are excluded and those most at risk.

Special measures: monitoring of Southern Cross School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 November 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work at both Castlefield and Yew Tree Lane sites. He scrutinised documents and met with the Principal of the Manchester Federation of Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties (ESBD) Schools, of which Southern Cross School is part, the heads of centre responsible for the two sites, the Chair of the Federation's Interim Executive Board, a representative of the local authority, teachers and students.

Context

Students in Years 7 to 9 (Key Stage 3) continue to be taught in temporary accommodation at the Yew Tree Lane site. The intention is to open a new, purpose-built school nearby for these students in September 2012. Students in Years 10 and 11 (Key Stage 4) continue to be educated at the Castlefield site, close to the city centre, alongside Key Stage 4 students from another of the Federation's ESBD day schools.

A major recruitment drive is taking place to secure permanent staff at both sites and to complete the selection of staff to key leadership positions. This process is well advanced. However, at the time of the monitoring inspection, the majority of teachers and teaching assistants at the Yew Tree Lane site were recruited from agencies and not employed directly by the school.

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

Clear improvement in students' attainment and achievement can be seen at the Castlefield site. There was a significant improvement in performance by students in the 2011 examinations, in the proportion of students achieving a qualification and in those achieving five GCSE grades A* to G. Students currently in Year 11 are on track to reach the highest examination results yet obtained in the school, including, for the first time, success for some in gaining five good GCSE grades in the range A* to C. In lessons observed, students of all abilities at Key Stage 4, including the small number of girls, wanted to improve and tried hard, responding well to their teachers' higher expectations of them. The lack of progress in English and mathematics lessons at Key Stage 4, mentioned in the previous inspection report, has been successfully resolved.

Achievement for Key Stage 3 students at the Yew Tree Lane site is less clear. Leaders have only recently established accurate assessments of the levels at which students in Years 7 to 9 are working and they are not yet in a position to report securely on students' progress. Nevertheless, this represents a distinct improvement since the last inspection. The progress

of Key Stage 3 students in lessons observed was satisfactory overall, although some good progress was observed in English. Students of all abilities in Key Stage 3 appeared happy to come to school and enjoyed good relationships with their teachers and support staff. In particular, a group of students displaying the most challenging behaviour were achieving success in the newly established nurture group.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection

- Improve students' achievement – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' emotional, social and behavioural difficulties are often severe and complex in nature. The heads of centre made it clear that several individual students may, at times, be unable to manage their behaviour successfully. The evidence of this inspection is that those occasions are less frequent. Exclusions at Key Stage 3 are falling significantly. Even so, with these younger students, there is often low-level misbehaviour in lessons, such as calling out inappropriately and some bad language. Teachers and support staff deal promptly and effectively with such behaviour, but they are diverted from the lesson and learning slows. Key Stage 4 pupils, on the other hand, show clear gains in maturity and in managing their behaviour. Within each of the lessons observed at the Castlefield site, students maintained their concentration and worked independently for sustained periods of time, enabling them to make good progress in their learning.

On both sites, considerable efforts have been made to improve students' attendance. Good attendance is celebrated and absence is followed-up rigorously by the school and in association with other agencies. Leaders know their students extremely well and can account for every day of absence. There have been remarkable successes with individual students. One or two intractable situations remain. However, these are always highly complex, involving the wider family and many agencies. Attendance at Key Stage 3 is higher than at Key Stage 4, although it is hovering stubbornly around 87%. Attendance at Key Stage 4 has improved to 75%, a gain of 16% over last year, with a commensurate fall in the percentage of persistent absentees. Neither head of centre is satisfied with attendance as yet and sees this aspect of one where further progress needs to be made.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Raise attendance – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The groundwork for the improvement in teaching quality is well established at both sites. Clear, consistent arrangements for planning lessons are in place, in particular, with each lesson plan having learning objectives of what students are to learn. Improvements in the levelling of students' work is helping teachers to pitch new work more accurately for students and to set more realistic and challenging targets for progress and/or for future examination success. Also, arrangements to meet each student's behavioural needs and to

decide on their objectives for improvement are in place and reviewed weekly. Marking of students' work has been a focus of development at both sites. Marking of good quality was seen that picked out what had been achieved and that suggested next steps for students. Overall, the teaching observed at the Castlefield site on the inspection was good, that at the Yew Tree Lane site, satisfactory. The recruitment drive at Castlefield is well advanced and its success can be seen in the improvement in teaching quality at the site. New, permanent teachers have not yet taken up their posts at the Yew Tree Lane site.

The curriculum for Key Stage 4 students is highly geared towards achieving qualifications and accreditations. There has been a step change in aspirations for students from Level 1 qualifications to Level 2. Teachers aim for success at GCSE, rather than, as before, at entry level. Core subjects are well represented, with students already enjoying much success in information and communications technology. Provision in science has been a weakness in the past but early indications are that this weakness is being remedied. There has been significant improvement in the curriculum for students at Key Stage 3. Students now enjoy access to all subjects of the National Curriculum.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve the quality of teaching – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Castlefield site has benefited far longer from settled and consistent leadership than has the Yew Tree Lane site. It has also gained from having accommodation and facilities of high quality, where students want to be. It is therefore, understandably, further advanced in its improvement than the Yew Tree Lane site and is now making good progress. The leadership at the Yew Tree Lane site is much improved, to the extent that the provision's decline has been arrested and sound procedures have been established to underpin further improvement. At both sites, the collection of reliable performance data and their use in tracking students' progress and setting targets, along with a thorough examination of what constitutes good teaching, are proving key aspects of progress. Effective monitoring and evaluation by leaders and managers, in their infancy at the time of the last inspection, are more thoroughly established. At both sites there is effective delegation of leadership roles, although some senior and middle leaders are new to their posts. The heads of centres, in particular, have a full and accurate knowledge of all aspects of their respective sites. At both sites, and particularly noticeable at the Yew Tree Lane site, staff show significant improvement in morale and commitment, in sharp contrast with the position detailed in the last inspection report.

A new interim executive board (IEB) for the Federation is overseeing the development of Southern Cross. Its members are highly experienced and expert in a range of disciplines. Already, leaders and managers report a heightened level of challenge and support from the IEB and an increased sense of accountability.

The specific safeguarding issue raised by the last inspection, concerning the safety and well-being of students who were off the site for a number of reasons, has been resolved by reduced exclusions, tightened procedures of reporting to senior managers and improved liaison with care agencies.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Strengthen the school's leadership, management and capacity for sustained improvement – good
- Improve the school's safeguarding practices – good

External support

The local authority is providing satisfactory support for the school. The thrust of its actions have been to secure and then support and facilitate the leadership of the school, particularly at the Yew Tree Lane site, and help in the recruitment drive. It has facilitated the creation of a new IEB. The shadow governing body has been abolished for the time being. New officers have been allocated to provide professional challenge and support for the school leaders. All these initiatives are proving helpful in the school's improvement. The local authority's statement of action was initially deemed inadequate. The shortfalls were remedied so that the statement met requirements. However, priorities are under review as progress in meeting the areas for improvement is made.