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20 January 2012

Mr A Stainton
Headteacher
Cheshunt School
College Road
Cheshunt
Waltham Cross
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Dear Mr Stainton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Cheshunt School

Following my visit with David Radomsky, additional inspector, to your school on 18–19 January 2012, 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 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 – good.

Newly qualified teachers may 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 18–19 January 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, and a parent who requested a meeting with HMI.

Context

An assistant headteacher and the head of science retired at the end of August 2011. A new assistant headteacher was appointed at the start of the November 2011. 2012.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school has developed an extensive assessment database and this information is being supplemented with early-entry data from the examination boards. HMI cross-referenced the school's data with the information related to the student achievement gathered during lesson observations. The school is confident that standards have risen and the increasing proportion of good teaching observed by inspectors would support this view. A new inclusion team began work in November with a focus on literacy and numeracy skills; the proportion of students who have secured a Level 2 qualification in these key skills is already notably above the 2011 results. However, the academic coaching programme under discussion needs to be finalised and linked to the renewed focus on marking if it is to have the desired impact on the 2012 results. Students made good progress in just over half of the lessons observed by inspectors, an improvement on the outcome of the previous monitoring visits.

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

- raise achievement – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

In selecting the lessons to be observed for this inspection, HMI focussed on those staff that had not been observed during the previous monitoring inspection and where teaching previously had required further development.

Effective teaching secured good or better achievement in 15 of the 26 lessons observed. In the best lessons, teachers' strong subject knowledge was used effectively to engage the students' attention, guide learning and address gaps in the students' prior knowledge. In a good Year 9 English lesson, the teacher introduced *Macbeth* by focusing the students' attention on examples of murder, how it is reported and the concept of evil. This produced an effective debate where students compared premeditation and degrees of evil before considering the actions of Lady Macbeth.

Where students made satisfactory progress, achievement would have been stronger if more emphasis had been placed on developing new knowledge and understanding or on the enhancement of subject-specific literacy and numeracy skills. Weak lessons failed to engage students in challenging work and, as a result, inappropriate behaviour was evident. In these lessons, work lacked challenge or students' behaviour was not managed in line with the school's expectations.

Some good marking was observed and work to standardise assessment has secured improvement. However, inconsistency of practice remains, between and within departments.

Two outstanding lessons were observed in science, a department where provision has been variable. Students in both Year 13 and Year 9 were making very good progress because of the teachers' high expectations. Strong focus on the accuracy of the scientific information recorded and discussed was effectively directed by the teachers' strong subject knowledge. The consistent use of progress criteria, well targeted at students' learning needs, was a positive feature in all lessons.

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

- improve the quality of teaching – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved as a result of better staff supervision and a more consistent approach to 'meeting and greeting' incoming pupils. The school is calmer at the change of lessons and student socialisation has replaced confrontation. Exclusions are a third lower than for the same period in the previous academic year.

Attendance has risen significantly. The 2010–11 average was 91.7% but figures for the autumn term 2011 reached 93.2%, a point which, if maintained, would be close to the average for secondary schools nationally. Over 20% of students recorded 100% attendance during the autumn term. Punctuality to school has improved noticeably and little time is lost as students move around the building.

These important improvements have been secured because of effective work by the student support team. The students' attitudes to learning were positive in over 90% of lessons.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Much has been achieved in recent months. Standards are improving as a result of better teaching; behaviour has improved and notable gains secured in attendance and punctuality as a result of leadership action. The impact of the leadership team is evident in the working of the student support and inclusion teams, staff professional development and performance management. A student leadership programme has been launched with considerable student support. School improvement planning is carefully considered and practical.

Senior leaders acknowledge that the use of tutor time and marking requires greater consistency; consideration is being given to a programme of academic coaching in Year 11.

HMI spent time working with middle leaders, the senior management team and governors explaining the requirements of the new 2012 inspection criteria, making clear what would be required for the removal of special measures.

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

- increase the pace of school improvement – good.

External support

The local authority's school improvement team provides effective support which the school manages well. Additional support with behaviour management has been brought in from a neighbouring local authority team to good effect.

Priorities for further improvement

- In order to secure the improvement in standards and achievement noted previously as evolving during the autumn term, the school should introduce a programme of academic coaching for Year 11 as soon as possible.