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11 March 2012

Mrs A Schofield
Principal
Manchester Federation of ESD Schools
c/o 200 Yew Tree Lane
Northern Moor
Manchester
M23 0FF

Dear Mrs Schofield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Southern Cross School

Following my visit to your school on 8 and 9 March 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 second 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

The school may appoint newly-qualified teachers to either site, although no more than one at Key Stage 3.

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 Strategic Director Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Padgett

Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in 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 second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 March 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

An assistant head of centre has been appointed at the Key Stage 3 site. The process of recruitment to permanent positions continues at both sites. The plan to move Key Stage 3 to new, purpose-built accommodation for September 2012 remains on track. The centre will share this accommodation with a pupil referral unit.

Achievement of students at the school

With the establishment of reliable assessments of students' attainment at Key Stage 3, teachers and senior leaders on this site are now in a position to begin to assess students' progress accurately. Early indications are that Year 7 students are making much better progress and that Year 8 and 9 students are making better progress. Lesson observations confirmed the improvement in Year 7 and suggested that Year 8 students are applying themselves to their work better as a result of improved teaching.

Students in Year 11 remain on track to achieve the highest results in examinations ever seen at the school, including success in obtaining five good passes at GCSE and/or equivalent.

The quality of provision for the 14 or so students educated partially or wholly off-site was a focus of this monitoring inspection. Evidence suggests that these students, who include some of the most vulnerable, make at least reasonable progress and that teaching concentrates appropriately for most on the acquisition of basic skills. At Key Stage 4, students are off-site for a wide range of reasons, including for vocational experience. Their progress is monitored carefully.

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

- Improve students' achievement – good

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 has improved since the first monitoring inspection and now matches that at Key Stage 4, where the quality of teaching has been maintained.

At both sites, the characteristics of good teaching are now seen in many lessons. Crucially, for a school of this nature, the relationships between staff and students are strong at both sites, with staff at all levels remaining positive and calm for the students. At Key Stage 3 there have been improvements in the planning of lessons, to the marking of work and to the rigour of assessments. A scrutiny of students' work indicated an improvement in the quality and presentation of students' work and, in Year 7, pieces of writing of greater length. Lessons at Key Stage 3 are becoming more interesting and involving for students as teachers become more creative in their planning. This is seen best at present in the nurture group, but can also be seen in most classes. An assembly observed at Key Stage 3 made a strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It provided clear evidence of an improvement in the ethos at Key Stage 3.

At Key Stage 4 the recent focus on getting lessons off to a good start, developed collaboratively during staff meetings, is paying dividends by engaging students in learning with no loss of time. Staff here are beginning to develop advanced features of teaching and learning that students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties find particularly challenging, such as self- and peer-assessment. Staff at both sites have rightly made the teaching and learning of literacy skills and communication priorities for students, so that all teachers, regardless of their subject specialism, teach aspects of reading, writing and spelling through a focus on language and literacy.

Staff engaged in off-site teaching are rigorous in maintaining records of progress. They also work effectively with parents and carers and with a range of external agencies.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Improving the attendance of students is proving elusive at both sites. At Key Stage 3, a dip in attendance before the Christmas break occurred because of a high incidence of illness among students. Attendance has now recovered to its previous level of 86%, just above the target. Attendance at Key Stage 4 remains stubbornly at 73% despite the best efforts of staff, including several unsuccessful attempts to prosecute parents of absent students. Exclusions at both sites are significantly reduced.

Students generally continue to present with often very challenging behaviours at some point during many lessons. However, at both sites, systems to deal with unacceptable behaviour are consistent and well-understood by staff and students. Staff remain positive and calm at all times and, as a result, individual students' difficulties do not become crises for staff and learning proceeds for those students remaining. Rewards and sanctions are firmly in place and students are developing a clear sense that unacceptable behaviour has consequences that must be faced sooner or later. Although it was not uncommon for students to leave a class mid-lesson, in all observations the students returned to class ready to continue their work before the lesson ended.

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

- Raise attendance – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The improvement in the leadership and management at Key Stage 3 has continued and that at Key Stage 4 maintained in its effectiveness. At Key Stage 3, the improved morale of staff, noted at the last monitoring inspection, is now greater still. Staff express more confidence in senior staff and long-serving members of staff say they are happier at the school than ever before. New staff at both sites comment on the quality of support they receive as newcomers, the way staff work as a team and how senior staff set high and consistent expectations.

Senior leaders at both sites rigorously track and evaluate students' progress and monitor the quality of the provision. This represents particular progress for leaders and managers at Key Stage 3. Here, delegation of responsibilities is improving and staff at all levels show a willingness to take on extra responsibility; for example, in supporting progress in reading development. At both sites leaders extend their monitoring activities to the oversight of provision outside school, including to those most vulnerable students currently educated off site. Continuous professional development at both sites is playing an increasingly important role in improving provision and consistency. Whereas the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is naturally geared towards the acquisition of qualifications in Year 11, there is scope within Key Stage 3 to develop a more relevant curriculum for students; for example, within mathematics. There is better liaison between the heads of centre within the federation of schools. This is having an impact on improving transition arrangements between Key Stages 3 and 4 and also on other practical matters.

The federation's Interim Executive Board is providing satisfactory support and challenge to the school. It has most recently been active in securing a budget for the school at a time of reduced funding. The Chair of the Interim Executive Board is proving effective in her involvement with Key Stage 3 and in influencing strategic direction, including closer working with families and more involvement with agencies, such as social care.

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

- Strengthen the school's leadership, management and capacity for sustained improvement – good
- Improve the school's safeguarding practices for students not attending school – good

External support

The local authority is providing satisfactory support to the school and to the federation's Interim Executive Board. The work of its commissioned adviser is proving helpful to senior staff, particularly at Key Stage 3, and the local authority's findings of progress and development within the school are in line with those of this monitoring inspection. In the

background, important strategic developments in the involvement of students' families and closer working with social care agencies are being facilitated.