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16 March 2012

Mr M Ironmonger
Headteacher
Moorbrook School
Ainslie Road
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Preston
Lancashire
PR2 3DB

Dear Mr Ironmonger

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Moorbrook School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 Governing Body and the Executive Director for Children and Young People in Lancashire.

Yours sincerely,

Liz Godman
Additional Inspector

January 2012



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2011

- Improve the arrangements for safeguarding students by:
 - ensuring that systems for recording child protection information are robust and files are regularly updated and organised.

- Raise achievement and accelerate progress by:
 - tracking students' progress more closely over time
 - developing the curriculum so that it more closely matches students' needs
 - ensuring that the support for vulnerable students is adequately targeted and has a positive impact on their learning and development.

- Improve students' behaviour and their social and emotional development so that they develop the personal and social skills they need for the future by:
 - embedding the new behaviour policy and procedures and ensuring that these are consistently applied by all staff
 - ensuring that students are clear about the expectations contained in the new policy and are given the support they need to develop self-resilience
 - ensuring that individual students are sufficiently well-supported both in and outside the classroom
 - reducing the number of exclusions
 - improving students' knowledge and understanding of life within a multi-ethnic society.

- Improve students' attendance to accelerate progress and help them gain the qualifications they need for the next steps of their education by:
 - ensuring that systems for contacting absentees are consistently and methodically carried out
 - working closely with both parents and carers and external agencies
 - monitoring the effectiveness of the procedures
 - supervising students' arrival at school and encouraging more to attend form-time breakfast-club.

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by:
 - clarifying the vision, developing clear aims and setting high expectations for the school
 - creating an effective senior leadership structure and developing the role of middle leaders throughout the school
 - establishing a comprehensive system to monitor and evaluate the school's work
 - ensuring that the governing body challenges and holds the school to account for the effectiveness of its provision and students' outcomes.

Special measures: monitoring of Moorbrook School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 15 March 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of students, a member and the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

There have been a number of staff absences since the last monitoring inspection. During this inspection, two members of the teaching staff were absent.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' achievement is improving steadily. Learning in lessons is becoming more effective as a greater number of students come to lessons ready to learn and expecting to work. Increasingly links are made between students' experiences and the lesson content so that students understand the relevance of what they are being asked to do. Consequently, students in Key Stage 4 are much more motivated by the range of accreditation on offer and are on track to attain higher levels by the end of Year 11 than cohorts in previous years. Students in Year 10 were eager to complete their citizenship coursework as this gave them insights into the penalties for using and supplying different illegal drugs. The same group showed a secure understanding of the themes in *Romeo and Juliet* and made clear links between these and aspects of modern life. Students in Year 8 were focused in a science lesson. Although they found the content difficult, they enjoyed the practical activities related to breathing and respiration.

The school's tracking data show a mixed picture of students' progress over time. Many students are now making better progress, but that of others is fluctuating. The school has a clear picture of how well students are progressing and of those who are experiencing particular difficulties. Some of this information is used to identify those who would benefit from additional support. However, it is not used precisely enough to ensure that planned work in lessons meets the needs of each student. Work has started on improving students' language, literacy and communication skills. This was identified at the last monitoring inspection as a barrier to accelerated progress for some students and there remains more to do to overcome the specific language and literacy difficulties of some students. In addition, the use of language and literacy is not promoted consistently across the different subjects of the curriculum.

In mathematics there is some evidence of increasing progress. Students of all ages showed better engagement than at previous monitoring inspections and enjoyed practical problem-

solving activities involving fractions at different levels of difficulty. For example, students in Years 8 and 9, including some in the nurture group, halved and quartered quantities in different recipes and are now eager to cook the dishes.

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

- raise achievement and accelerate progress – satisfactory

The quality of teaching

The overall quality of teaching continues to improve. This is resulting in better learning and engagement in lessons and the steadily-improving achievement of many students. Generally, planned activities are more closely-matched to the range of needs of students in the group. However, sometimes the lesson content is pitched too high for some. This results in their frustration and loss of focus. The reluctance of some students to write also hinders their progress. Although strategies and programmes are being developed to better meet the needs of those with language and literacy difficulties, these are not securely established and there is not a consistent approach to teaching language and literacy skills across the curriculum. Where teaching is more effective, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) enables students to produce work of a higher quality. However, the use of ICT by students in the different subjects of the curriculum remains underdeveloped. Teaching assistants are used more effectively, so that they are providing better support for learning as well as managing behaviour in lessons.

There is evidence in some lessons that teachers are adjusting the lesson content in light of students' responses, but this does not always happen. The quality of marking continues to give students clearer feedback as to how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. A closer focus in the curriculum on Entry Level and GCSE requirements is helping to raise students' aspirations, especially of those who are older and more able. There are some students, particularly in Year 11, for whom the curriculum and the school's teaching are not securing their interest and attendance. However, they do attend school to take examinations because they understand the importance of these for their future education and employment.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' attitudes and behaviour are showing signs of general improvement. The school's records of serious incidents indicate that these have reduced considerably since the last monitoring inspection. The use of exclusions has also reduced, indicating improving behaviour over time. Students' attitudes to learning are also becoming more positive. Consequently, learning proceeds without disruption in a greater proportion of lessons. Where learning is disrupted by inappropriate behaviour, its impact has reduced so that in more lessons other students ignore the disruption and carry on with or resume their work swiftly. The incidence of physical assaults on adults and students is less than it was at the last monitoring inspection and most students behave safely in lessons. However, in some

lessons and around school, students still use inappropriate language or are verbally disrespectful to other students and adults.

The school's systems for managing students' behaviour are applied increasingly consistently. As a result, students are more aware of the consequences of their actions. This is helping to improve their behaviour. Students are building greater resilience to enable them to respond more appropriately to unfamiliar or difficult situations, although this is still at an early stage for some. However, others respond more calmly and recognise when they need to move away from an incident or lesson that is difficult for them.

Students' attendance shows steady improvement since the last monitoring inspection, particularly for Years 7, 8 and 10. This is because the school monitors attendance closely and follows up absence rigorously. Although students' attendance showed a dip during the monitoring inspection, the school knew the whereabouts of the absentees. Attendance in Year 11 shows fewer signs of improvement. Students are now more punctual, both at the start of the day and at lesson changeovers, so that most lessons start punctually. Similarly, a greater number of students stay in the classroom for the duration of the lesson and internal truancy is reduced.

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

- improve students' behaviour and their social and emotional development so that they develop the personal and social skills they need for the future – satisfactory
- improve students' attendance to accelerate progress and help them gain the qualifications they need for the next steps of their education – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders are raising the expectations and confidence of staff and students. This greater sense of shared ambition is helping to improve the effectiveness of the school. Leaders have taken effective steps to broaden and improve the relevance of the school's curriculum and this is helping to increase students' interest and engagement. The more relevant curriculum is also helping to improve students' skills for the future and to broaden their moral, social and cultural understanding. School data show that behaviour and attendance are both improving over time as a result of the actions taken by senior leaders and the governing body. Students, staff and the local authority comment that the school is generally a much calmer place. Complaints from the immediate community have reduced and compliments about the school's work and the behaviour of the students have increased. The school's leaders, in partnership with support from the local authority, are also improving the quality of teaching and students' learning. However, the impact of this on sustained improvement to teaching has been adversely affected by a number of absences of key teaching staff. Similarly, some of these absences have placed some limitations on the development of the role of middle leaders.

The school's plans for improvement are rightly focused on teaching and students' progress and the impact of the plans is monitored closely and rigorously. This monitoring shows that

the school is increasingly effective in making the improvements identified as necessary by the inspection of January 2011. Self-evaluation continues to be accurate and involves a wider range of personnel. The governing body members are important partners with school staff in this more effective evaluation of the school's work. More members of the governing body visit the school while it is in operation and this gives them a sharper understanding of what is going well and what improvements remain to be completed. Governors have a clear view of the school's remaining weaknesses. More accurate evaluation of the school's work, stronger leadership and the improvements made to date are helping to increase the school's capacity for further improvement. However, this remains insecure.

The points relating to safeguarding which were brought to the headteacher's attention at the last monitoring inspection have all been attended to effectively.

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

- improve the arrangements for safeguarding students – satisfactory
- strengthen the leadership and management of the school – good

External support

The local authority continues to give good support to the school. The local authority adviser for monitoring and intervention keeps a close check on the school's progress but also recognises the school's growing capacity to evaluate its own effectiveness and to determine its own priorities.

Advanced skills teachers continue to provide support to develop teaching and learning, working with individual staff to increase their effectiveness. However, the local authority recognises that more work is needed to improve the quality of teaching and to embed the consistent use of assessment, in order to raise students' achievement further.