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Mrs Hilary Harris, executive headteacher
Mr Richard Berry, acting headteacher
Bristol Gateway School
Long Cross
Bristol
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Dear Mrs Harris and Mr Berry

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bristol Gateway School

Following my visit with David McMahon, Additional inspector, to your school on 14 and 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 Director of Children's Services for Bristol.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of students' learning, progress and attendance.

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - have sufficient subject knowledge
 - tailor work to the individual needs of students
 - apply consistent behaviour management and deploy additional adults effectively.

- Improve the quality of the curriculum so that there is sufficient coverage and progression in all subjects.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - reviewing the current structure and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of leaders, including governors
 - providing appropriate professional development so that all leaders play a full part in accurately monitoring the school's performance and driving improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Bristol Gateway School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 14 and 15 March 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with members of the senior leadership team, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and an officer from the local authority. Eleven lessons were observed.

Context

In February 2012, following a period of formal consultation, a hard federation was established with Woodstock School, the local primary school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The federation is known as the Woodway Federation. The executive headteacher leads both schools and there is one governing body. The local authority continues to retain financial responsibilities. Formal consultation is currently under way to review the staffing structure for teachers and learning mentors. The level of staff absence is high. Lessons are frequently covered by other staff or supply staff. One learning mentor has left the school and three teachers have been appointed on temporary contracts.

The off-site unit, Cashmore House Unit (CHU), closed in December 2012, following concerns about the quality of teaching and some health and safety issues. Six of the students moved on to other placements. The other nine remain on the school's roll.

Achievement of pupils at the school

A second set of assessments on students' progress is complete and shows a mixed picture of progress for the first half of this academic year. Targets for the year are appropriately challenging so that students make up for lost learning and there are early signs that increasing proportions make progress in line with these expectations. Variation occurs between different year groups and subjects, consistent with the quality of teaching, and the negative impact of staff absences. This is particularly the case for English and mathematics in Key Stage 3, where progress is too variable. The subject in which students make the most consistent progress is science. Good progress for Year 11 students earlier in the year has been maintained. There are some striking examples of accelerated progress by individual students as a result of programmes to support self-esteem, for example, a sport-related programme and learning through design and technology projects.

In lessons, students' progress varies from inadequate to good. When given opportunities, students apply learning independently and thoughtfully, as seen in a geography lesson. Students attended well to the teachers' explanations, respectfully adhered to expectations for their behaviour and asked questions to clarify their

understanding. In some lessons, students are reluctant to work independently, because they are not encouraged to do so, waste time and disrupt the learning of others. Work in students' books shows some improvement in quality and quantity, providing a better record of learning and attainment.

The overall rate of attendance remains too low but within this is an improving picture because low attendance is now largely confined to a particular group of non-attenders and some exceptional circumstances for others. A significant issue remains, and that is the impact of temporary periods of exclusion on the attendance of too many students. The incidence of exclusion remains too high.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement.

- Urgently improve the quality of students' learning, progress and attendance – satisfactory

The quality of teaching

More good teaching was observed on this visit. There is now a clear focus on learning. Teachers routinely help students to understand the lesson objectives and success criteria. Increasingly, displays provide support for learning, for example information on levels of work and useful vocabulary. Not enough students' work is on display. Some inadequate teaching remains.

There are three particular aspects which affect the quality of teaching and students' learning. First, lesson planning is inconsistent and gives insufficient structure for teachers who need to improve their practice, and to those who are inexperienced. As a result, work is not planned or structured sufficiently to ensure that students of different abilities complete tasks independently at their own level. Additionally, it means that support staff are not always deployed to make an appropriate contribution to students' learning.

Second, and closely linked to planning, teachers' use of assessment varies too much. This has been a focus of recent training. When assessment is used well, students' learning is moved on swiftly as the lesson progresses, work in books shows how well students apply their learning independently so that their achievements can be accurately assessed, and marking provides helpful feedback for future reference.

Third, students are not challenged to be sufficiently independent. This makes some students appear helpless and hinders their independence and resilience. This links with weaknesses in assessment because of limited opportunities for students to show what they can do so that gaps in their skills can be addressed in future lessons. In several lessons seen, staff misguidedly helped students too much, sometimes writing everything for them or had low aspirations for them to work out answers, spellings or sentences for themselves. This is compounded by having too

many support staff in some lessons, leading to one-to-one attention, which is neither financially sustainable nor educationally effective. In contrast, high aspirations from staff in an English lesson resulted in each student making good progress in explaining the unappealing side of human nature in war, through poetry. This was particularly the case for those who found it difficult to explain their reasons in front of the others.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement.

- Improve the quality of teaching – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Currently, approximately a third of students are excluded temporarily each term, usually for one day at a time. The number of missed sessions has been significantly reduced but the proportion of students involved remains the same and is too high and has not been sufficiently addressed. This must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The revised reward system was implemented recently and early signs are that students and staff are more engaged and motivated through its use, but students' inappropriate behaviour is not always challenged, particularly low-level disruption. In too many of the lessons seen, staff cajoled students to comply, rather than using the behaviour management and reward systems to ensure an appropriate outcome. In lessons when inappropriate behaviour is challenged, strategies prove to be effective and the outcomes for students and staff are positive, as seen in an art lesson. In other lessons, intervention is not required at all because students respect and respond well to the clear and non-negotiable boundaries set by the staff.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The quality of students' outcomes is now firmly established as the priority for the school's work and the roles and responsibilities of senior staff and governors have been clarified. This is helping staff and governors to appreciate the need for a greater sense of urgency. Recent work on tracking students' attainments by the headteachers provides a clearer picture of academic progress. The governing body provides a better level of challenge about students' attainments and requires senior staff to answer questions on the information presented to the school improvement committee. Subject leaders of English and science are making better use of assessment information to evaluate students' performance and are working more effectively to lead their departments to improve the curriculum. The leader of teaching and learning has observed all teachers formally and is supporting staff with individual action plans. This is already improving teaching, as is the temporary appointment of two part-time teachers of English and mathematics.

The governing body produced a budget plan to show how the school will operate within its budget in the future. The local authority is confident that the governing body is working well towards taking on more financial responsibility in the future.

Improvements to the curriculum include more-suitable arrangements for those students previously attending the off-site unit. In partnership with the local authority, the headteachers moved swiftly following the previous visit to ensure that all students were suitably placed and had either a full timetable or part-time provision that will lead to a full programme. The additional sessions for literacy and numeracy are now better planned and provide staff and students with a clearer focus for the lesson but it is not yet clear if the extra work has a lasting impact on students' skills. Also unclear is how well literacy skills are taught and reinforced through the curriculum, including the systematic teaching of reading and spelling.

Staff absence is too high and is the main thing now preventing the school from moving forward faster. This needs to be tackled and remedied with urgency so that students have a consistent and predictable educational experience. In addition, there are some unresolved staffing issues, including some extended periods of absence.

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

- Improve leadership and management – satisfactory
- Improve the quality of the curriculum so that there is sufficient coverage and progression in all subjects – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has supported the school well in a number of areas which help to bring more stability for students. These include preparation for the federation, the appointment of additional teachers for English and mathematics, and moving some students on to other provision. The progress review group continues to provide a good level of rigour and challenge, ensuring that senior staff are held accountable for the impact of their actions.