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Mrs Gloria Lowe
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lowe

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Northolt High School

Following my visit with Robert Smith, Heidi Boreham and Joseph Skivington, Additional inspectors to your school on 20–21 June 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2012. 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 be appointed to subject areas where appropriate mentoring and strong professional support can be assured.

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 executive headteacher, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Executive Director of Children and Adults for Ealing.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012

- Eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and raise the achievement of all groups of students by:
 - using accurate assessment data and information about prior learning and individual learning needs to plan and deliver lessons that interest, challenge and engage all students
 - identifying clear opportunities to assess and check students' understanding during lessons so that teaching can be amended in response to the learning that is taking place
 - using a coherent approach to developing students' basic skills in literacy, communication and mathematics across every subject.

- Improve students' behaviour so that they are fully engaged in their learning by:
 - ensuring that staff at all levels systematically and consistently take responsibility for enforcing punctuality to lessons
 - conveying consistently high expectations of behaviour and equipping students with the correct skills to control and regulate their own behaviour.

- Eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of leadership and management and governance:
 - ensuring that senior leaders and governors communicate high expectations and an explicit vision for improvement that is clearly understood by staff, parents and carers and students
 - analysing precisely the impact of planned improvement plans on students' outcomes so that decisive action can be taken to remedy weaknesses
 - ensuring that all assessment data are accurate and that all staff understand how to use them to improve performance.

Special measures: monitoring of Northolt High School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 20–21 June 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They visited 37 lessons and observed 37 teachers. They also made some brief drop-in visits to lessons, focusing on behaviour. Four of these observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Year 11 and Year 13 students were not present during the inspection. Inspectors met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, other leaders and staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, a local authority representative, groups of students and a group of parents and carers. During the course of the visit they also spoke informally with staff and students.

Context

The headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body resigned shortly after the February 2012 inspection. An executive headteacher took up post in April. He is also the headteacher of Brentside High School. He is initially working with Northolt High School up to four days a week but this will reduce from September. A new headteacher took up her post in April 2012 and a deputy headteacher took up her post in June 2012. One deputy headteacher post is vacant. An associate leader with responsibility for literacy has been seconded from the local authority for two days a week during this term. The school is currently in the process of restructuring the senior leadership team. The remaining changes are expected to take effect from the autumn term 2012. An Interim Executive Board (IEB), consisting of five members, took responsibility for the governance of the school on 28 March 2012.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students are making better progress in lessons than when the school was last inspected. This is a direct result of better teaching and the students' much improved attitudes to learning. Almost four fifths of students are making expected or better levels of progress in mathematics, an improvement on last year. Three fifths of Year 11 students have already gained an A* to C grade in mathematics; an increase on 2011. Over two thirds of students are making expected or better progress in English, which is also an improvement. In some subjects, for example the school's specialist area of technology, students make good progress because they are exposed to effective teaching over time. However, too many students have poor writing skills and are careless in the presentation of their work.

Students, staff and parents and carers speak of a much better ethos for learning in the school. This is reflected in the displays around the school which are now about students engaged in learning. Students demonstrate that they are keen to learn and

this is particularly evident when they are exposed to better teaching. They enjoy the increased opportunities to discuss ideas and most of them are busily focused on their learning. This was evident in mathematics and science lessons when they worked well together to find and share solutions to practical and real-life problems. These opportunities sharpen their oral communication skills and enhance their social development. Students say that English lessons have improved and they enjoy the opportunities to assess and comment on each other's work. This was also evident to inspectors. Students show similar levels of engagement in many other subjects, for example in art where they were developing their understanding of cubism. In a personal, social and health education lesson, Year 7 students made excellent gains in their learning as they explored different types of food and how they contributed to a healthy lifestyle. At the same time they extended their literacy skills and broadened their vocabulary through group and whole-class discussion. Where the teaching is weaker, students move at a slower pace and struggle to remain engaged. Too many are not stretched enough. They seem quite content to be passive observers while others do more of the work.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. There is a greater awareness among the staff about the priority they need to give to students' learning. The significant reduction in the use of supply teachers means that students now receive a more consistent and better quality of teaching. Students, parents and carers comment positively on the noticeable difference in what is happening in the classroom. Inspectors agree. They found a higher proportion of good teaching and some that was outstanding. These findings are consistent with the recent local authority review. However, inspectors also found pockets of inadequate teaching and some that is not yet consistently good enough.

In better lessons, teachers plan well, using the information they have about students to focus sharply on achievable learning outcomes for all. Teachers' explanations and expectations are crystal clear and are more grounded in secure subject knowledge. An increasing proportion of teaching is lively, challenging and engaging, because enthusiastic and passionate teachers employ a variety of activities and strategies which they carefully adapt to students' abilities and needs. Teachers make good use of additional resources to capture interest and enhance learning. Rapport with students is more positive and friendly, but also firm and focused on the business of learning. Students respond well to the better opportunities they are given to assess their own work against target levels and to evaluate the work of their peers. Teachers' regular and open-ended questioning, use of small whiteboards and colour cards, enable them to gauge how well students are doing and what adjustments are needed to step up the pace of learning. More students are given opportunities to reflect and process information before moving on to the next activity. Teachers and other staff provide carefully managed support to those with special educational needs or who speak English as an additional language. This helps them unlock

difficulties with language and concepts. Teachers provide a broader range of opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills through extended writing. However, teachers miss opportunities to encourage the development of students' numeracy skills. Written feedback is developmental and increasingly helps students make the link between the quality of their work and what they need to do next.

There are a number of common factors in the lessons where teaching is not yet effective enough. In these lessons, teachers are not sufficiently alert and responsive to the variations in the levels of students' engagement and understanding. Their strategies and use of questions do not engage students enough to interest and motivate them. Consequently, some students are not stretched enough in their thinking, others struggle to apply what they have learnt and some do not engage sufficiently well in the activities. There are occasional instances where teachers' planning is of poor quality and resources were not used well. Assessment routines and use of marking are inconsistent and insufficiently helpful in guiding students in improving their work. There is little evidence that students have responded to the written feedback. Insufficient time and focus are given to improving the quality of some students' handwriting, spelling and presentation.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection.

- Eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and raise the achievement of all groups of students – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers, staff and students speak with one voice about how noticeably calmer the school is. In the majority of lessons students are on task and contributing to a positive work ethos. Staff are more visible during change of lessons and students are positive in their engagement with each other and with staff during these times. There has been some improvement in punctuality to lessons. However, a number of lessons started late because of the slow arrival of a few. The size of the school and the timetabling of particular lessons do not help because students have a relatively long distance to travel during changeover periods. This is something which the school will be addressing with the September timetable. There are also occasions where students move to lessons at a leisurely pace and consequently do not make best use of learning time. Students wear their uniform with pride and their smart attire reflects the more positive ethos of the school. These changes are a direct result of the high expectations of staff, consistency in behaviour management and the more positive responses of students. Students say they feel respected and they are responding in like manner. They feel safer and cared for. The rate of exclusion has fallen and attendance remains above average.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection.

- Improve students' behaviour so that they are fully engaged in their learning – good

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The key changes in governance and at the top tier of leadership have had considerable impact in some key areas in a very short space of time. However, in other areas it is too soon to see the impact. The headteacher and executive headteacher work extremely well together and share a common vision for improvement. They are driving through a set of development priorities with resolute determination and taking staff and students with them in the process. They have created a mindset where confidence has grown and excuses have no home. They set high expectations for performance management and have established clear line management arrangements. Staff accurately describe the change as 'a culture shift'. Leaders at all levels feel more empowered and supported because they are encouraged to take ownership and initiative. Staff speak of greater consistency because they are clear about what is expected of them.

Leaders are rightly focusing on laying secure foundations, getting the basics right and the impact is becoming evident. There has been a reduction in the number of supply teachers. Leaders through support and challenge are tackling inadequacy in teaching. They are undertaking regular and focused observations of lessons, and have sharpened the focus of professional development. All teachers have been observed at least once and many have been observed twice. As a result, leaders have a very secure baseline understanding of where they need to focus next. The quality of teaching is not where it needs to be. Systems for data collection and use of assessment are more comprehensive and secure, but their impact on classroom practice is at a relatively early stage. The restructuring process has not yet been completed. The highly experienced and skilled IEB is playing a key role in supporting these new developments and in monitoring and holding the school to account. Along with senior leaders, the IEB is focused on rapid, but sustainable change and is carrying out its role extremely well.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection.

- Eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of leadership and management and governance – satisfactory

External support

The local authority's statement of action meets requirements and sets out an appropriately phased plan to ensure that the school will come out of special measures. Phase one is being successfully implemented with a key focus on getting the basics right. Phase two planning is underway. The school benefits from a wide range of high quality support, exemplified in the skills that the executive headteacher brings to the school. The local authority provides very valued support and challenge, reflected in the contribution of the lead secondary education professional. Key staff from the local authority are also contributing positively in

many ways, for instance, through support for literacy and science development. The family of Ealing secondary schools has been extremely supportive, for example, with the recent external review of teaching at Northolt High School where four schools enabled their senior staff to take part. The partnership with Brentside High School is adding significant value through, for instance, the work on improving data systems.