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6 July 2012

Mr Martyn Berry
Holbrook High School
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Dear Mr Berry

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holbrook High School

Following my visit with Louise Lee Additional Inspector, to your school on 4–5 July 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 and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- By September 2013, increase the pace of students' learning and progress to raise attainment to at least the national average by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good or better teaching
 - ensuring that assessment is accurate and lessons well planned so that all teaching challenges all students
 - consistently developing students' skills in literacy and numeracy in other subjects as well as mathematics and English.

- With the involvement of parents, carers and students, by September 2012, tackle issues that a significant number of them are concerned about by:
 - ensuring that all teachers implement behaviour policies consistently so that disruptive behaviour in class is eliminated
 - devising and implementing a structured homework policy for all subjects that includes how it is marked and clear guidance to ensure that homework consolidates classroom learning.

- By September 2012 improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - improving systems for observing lessons so that students' learning and progress are accurately monitored
 - systematically identifying and disseminating the very best practice in teaching and learning, for example that found in English and history
 - holding school leaders fully to account for the progress made by students
 - ensuring that all targets for performance management are challenging, clearly understood by those who are responsible and accountable for them, and set within a precise timeframe
 - ensuring that the governing body monitors all improvements rigorously, challenging where appropriate.

Special measures: monitoring of Holbrook High School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 July 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with academy leaders, teachers, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and spoke to parents and carers on the telephone.

Context

The headteacher at the time of the last inspection has since left the academy. The acting deputy became the acting headteacher. Since 11 June 2012, an interim headteacher has been in post and the acting headteacher is now the head of school.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Students are making satisfactory progress in lessons and this is more consistent across subjects than at the time of the last inspection. Convincing data, provided by the academy on outcomes for the current Year 11 students, suggest that the proportion gaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above, including mathematics and English, will be above the national average and significantly higher than last year.

Systems for tracking the progress of students are in the process of being developed. They provide some indication of the progress students are making, but do not currently allow sophisticated analysis by all subject leaders in order to support them in improving outcomes in their areas of responsibility. Good practice was observed in art and in information and communication technology (ICT), where adjustments have been made to match the needs of the students more closely. This is having a positive impact on outcomes in those subjects. The gap in achievement between boys and girls is still evident. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are making the progress expected of them; they are making better progress in English than in mathematics. Pastoral staff use data to monitor behaviour and make adjustments to provision as necessary.

The vast majority of students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and cooperate well with their teachers and with each other in lessons. In some lessons, students show they can work independently of the teacher, especially where the teacher deliberately uses strategies to support that development. Examples were seen in ICT, where more-able students acted as tutors for less-able classmates and

in science, where sophisticated questioning encouraged them to explain their presentations.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- By September 2013, increase the pace of students' learning and progress to raise attainment to at least the national average – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. Students comment positively on the quality of the teaching they receive. Inspectors observed a proportion of good teaching and some that was outstanding. However, inspectors also found pockets of inadequate teaching.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers use the information they have about students to focus sharply on setting achievable learning outcomes for all. Teachers' secure subject knowledge enables them to explain and share the objectives for the lesson with the students. They make appropriate use of humour and non-confrontational approaches in managing behaviour to ensure that relationships in classrooms are positive. Teachers employ a variety of activities and strategies which they adapt to students' abilities and needs. For example, in an English lesson students worked in groups that were carefully constructed to include a mixture of those working at one of three levels. This allowed all to be challenged, but also increased cooperation and opportunities to support students' social development and independence.

Students respond well to opportunities they are given to assess their own work against target levels and to evaluate the work of their peers. Teachers and other staff provide carefully managed support to those with special educational needs. In some subjects, such as English, written feedback is developmental and helps students make the link between the quality of their work and what they need to do next. A simple but effective assessment and recording system ensures consistency across the department. However, the quality of marking remains very variable across subject areas.

A number of common factors are evident 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. For example, in question and answer sessions some are allowed to remain passive and opt out of the activity. Insufficient time is allowed for students to reflect on their learning or they are required to begin activities without adequate preparation. As a result, the pace of their learning drops and some disengage. Activities are planned and resources produced which have a greater focus on what students will be doing than what they will be learning. Opportunities are missed in some lessons to support

students' literacy. Handwriting and presentation in some books is particularly poor and teachers give insufficient attention to developing students' use of subject-specific technical language to discuss and evaluate their work. Insufficient thought is given to capitalising in lessons on opportunities to support students' spiritual and cultural development.

Students and parents and carers confirm that more homework is being set, but it is not always sufficiently related to the work done in lessons to support students' progress. Evidence in the students' books shows that the very recently introduced policy on homework has yet to be implemented.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- By September 2012, tackle the issues that parents, carers and students raised regarding the devising and implementing of a structured homework policy for all subjects that includes how it is marked and clear guidance that homework consolidates classroom learning – inadequate.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A positive and calm atmosphere is evident around the academy. Students are very polite, considerate and respectful during break and lunchtimes. On the first day of the visit, Year 6 pupils who will join the academy in September 2012 were visiting for an induction day. They reported that they were happy and appeared completely at ease as they mingled in the hall with the older students during break.

Students arrive punctually to lessons with little coaxing needed from staff. Good relationships were a feature of lessons and although some off-task behaviour was observed, where teaching failed to engage the students, no disruption occurred. However, students reported that in some lessons, disruption does still occur. Parents and carers spoken to during the visit were satisfied that behaviour was acceptable. Closer monitoring of supply teachers and better support for them has reduced the disruption in their lessons.

Students appreciate the improved systems for rewarding good behaviour, but these are not yet consistently applied across the academy.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- By September 2012, tackle the issues that parents, carers and students raised regarding the consistent implementation of behaviour policies so that disruptive behaviour in class is eliminated – satisfactory.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The key changes in leadership have had considerable positive impact on staff morale and the ethos in the academy in a very short space of time. However, in many areas it is too soon to see the full impact. The interim headteacher and the head of school work 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 increased staff confidence and set high expectations in the new processes for performance management. Clear line management arrangements have been established and leaders at all levels feel more empowered and supported. An open and confident attitude to the greatly increased level of classroom observations is evidence of this new ethos. All teams within the academy feel that communication is very much improved and they have the necessary information to carry out their roles and responsibilities more effectively.

Regular observations of lessons have given senior leaders a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and they have accurately identified those practitioners with the skills to act as coaches to support others. New roles for leaders of learning are in place for September 2012 to continue the work on raising the quality of teaching further. Systems for data collection and use of assessment are at a relatively early stage. The governing body has been restructured to ensure decision making is more effective and timely. They are more in evidence around the academy as they increasingly ensure they have first-hand evidence of the impact of improvement work. The academy's procedures for checking and recording the suitability of staff and volunteers in working with students meet current governing requirements.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- By September 2012 improve leadership and management, including governance – satisfactory.

External support

Specialist expertise has been commissioned to speed up some of the practical improvements needed, for example the reworking of the timetable for September 2012. As a result, teachers are confident that they will be teaching within their areas of expertise and the number of split classes has been significantly reduced. This has ensured staff can concentrate on raising the quality of teaching. The governing body have been supported by specialist advice from a number of external organisations, including the Department for Education.

The proprietor's statement of action has been amended, but requires some further adjustments in order to ensure it drives the improvements more rapidly and securely. Improvements being undertaken to the plan will ensure that all leaders are

clear of their roles and responsibilities in securing the required improvements in student achievement.