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11 July 2012

Mr B Evans
Headteacher
Notton House School
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Dear Mr Evans

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Notton House School

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 fourth 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 – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed to work in the school.

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 and Young People's Services for Bristol City Council.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve students' achievements and progress by:
 - taking effective action to improve attendance
 - ensuring that the amount of time for teaching meets recommendations
 - ensuring that students in Key Stage 3 study all subjects within the National Curriculum
 - ensuring all students have equal access to the range of experiences within the curriculum
 - improving the planning and monitoring of the curriculum, including in off-site provision, to ensure provision is of a high quality
 - establishing systems to develop and monitor the teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

- Improve standards in English by:
 - ensuring that teachers' lesson planning provides students with a range of experiences that improve their skills
 - ensuring teaching is consistently of a good quality
 - ensuring that the progress of those students with low literacy skills is monitored effectively to make sure they are making the progress they should.

- Improve behaviour by fully embedding the new systems for managing and improving students' behaviour.

- Improve the impact of the governing body by ensuring it fulfils its role in challenging the school to address weaknesses and support its improvement.

- Meet all National Minimum Standards for boarding.

Special measures: monitoring of Notton House School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 July 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work including six lessons, scrutinised documents and held discussions with students, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a local authority officer. The residential provision was not inspected on this visit.

Context

Since the last visit, the school roll has decreased from 38 to 28 students due to Year 11 students having recently left. The position of one teacher on long-term sick leave continues to be covered by a supply teacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Lesson observations, the school's assessment data and students' work show students are making faster progress, especially in English, mathematics and science. Year 11 students are expected to leave the school having achieved better results in examinations than they did in the previous year. However, while several students should gain a GCSE pass in English, mathematics or science, other subjects are only studied up to Entry level, which is not sufficiently challenging for most students. The school has suitable plans to extend the range of courses offered at GCSE level. The school has been successful in preparing two students to return to a mainstream school.

The literacy coordinator is monitoring the teaching of literacy in subjects across the school and setting targets for improvement. Those students with low levels of literacy receive intensive individual support to help them catch up. A thorough system for assessing and recording students' progress is in place. Initial evidence shows that most students are making progress at a faster rate than they did previously, especially in reading. The literacy coordinator recognises that the teaching of literacy is not yet underpinned by an agreed school policy and she has this as a priority for development.

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

- Improve standards in English – good

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Higher expectations are evident and generally a positive climate for learning prevails in lessons. In the best lessons,

teachers use their secure subject knowledge to promote extended discussion and encourage students to give explanations to each other. A good variety of resources are used which capture students' interest, for example the text of 'War Horse' in English, or the use of information and communication technology in science. Occasionally the pace of learning slows when learning objectives are not closely linked to students' previous knowledge and skills. The use of marking varies between subjects, and staff are currently finalising a marking policy to ensure greater consistency.

Behaviour and safety

Agreed systems for managing students' behaviour are understood and implemented by staff. Points for rewarding effort and achievement are successful in helping to motivate students. Students generally settle quickly to their work and apply themselves well. This is particularly so when lessons are planned to provide the right amount of challenge for students. Occasionally, a few students absent themselves from lessons, although the school has suitable arrangements for following this up.

Recently the school has admitted a small number of students with more complex and challenging needs. Subsequently, there has been an increase in the number of serious behavioural incidents and in the number of exclusions. The school is reviewing its arrangements for meeting the needs of these students and has modified the curriculum to provide them with more individual support.

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

- Improve behaviour by fully embedding the new systems for managing and improving students' behaviour – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have a better understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. A recently introduced system for the regular monitoring of teaching provides a more accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Data are being used more effectively to check the achievement of different groups and to track students' progress over time. Senior leaders monitor attendance regularly and work closely with families and a range of agencies to help students who have a history of poor attendance. School data show a trend of steady improvement for attendance.

Curriculum planning has been extended to provide a wider range of more challenging courses for students in Years 10 and 11. In September 2012, GCSE or equivalent examination courses will be introduced for art, design and technology, information and communication technology and physical education. Some of the curriculum improvement has been supported by working in partnership with another

special school catering for students with similar needs. Senior leaders have reviewed the work of the off-site centre and have suitable plans to link its vocational programme more closely with the other courses available in the main school. While this shows considerable potential, it is too early to judge the impact of these developments on students' achievement. At Key Stage 3, students study a broad range of subjects which take close account of the National Curriculum. However, senior leaders recognise planning is not complete for some subjects, for example music.

The governing body is demonstrating greater impact on the school's performance. It has a better understanding of students' learning and behavioural difficulties and is more aware of the next steps the school needs to take on its journey of improvement. Key areas of the school's work are reviewed, for example students' behaviour and progress, and searching questions asked about the success of different initiatives. Governors visit the school and give reports on aspects of the school's performance to the full governing body.

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

- Improve students' achievements and progress – satisfactory
- Improve the impact of the governing body – good
- Meet all National Minimum Standards for boarding – this aspect of the school's work was not inspected on this visit.

External support

The school continues to benefit from a good level of support. The local authority has provided advice on the management of students' special educational needs and given support to the governing body to enhance its ability to hold the school to account. An educational psychologist and a speech and language therapist have given valued staff training on behaviour management and on students' use of language.