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27 September 2012

Ms Felicity Martin
The Clere School
Earlstone Common
Burghclere
Newbury
Berkshire
RG20 9HP

Dear Ms Martin

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Clere School

Following my visit with Stephanie Matthews, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 September 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Chris Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement of all groups of students by:
 - ensuring that there is a shared approach to judging levels of attainment and agree what good and outstanding progress means in relation to students' starting points
 - using assessment data and information about individual needs to plan lessons that interest and challenge students of differing abilities and extend their thinking
 - ensuring all staff are focused on what students are learning in individual lessons and the longer term, in order to meet suitably challenging targets.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and governance by:
 - making senior leaders accountable for evaluating all aspects of the school's work with greater rigour and accuracy
 - ensuring the performance and experience of different groups are tracked and analysed
 - implementing clearly focused plans to rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning and share good and outstanding practice across the school
 - communicating consistently high expectations and an explicit vision for improvement that is clearly understood by staff, parents and carers, and students
 - applying the school's behaviour management system consistently and taking effective action to tackle persistent absence.

Special measures: monitoring of The Clere School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 September 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed parts of 20 lessons taught by 20 teachers. Fourteen lesson observations were conducted jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors met with school staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority. They talked to students in lessons and met with groups of students from Year 7 and Year 11. Inspectors reviewed planning and students' work in lessons. Inspectors also examined a range of school documents, including self-evaluation and information about students' achievement, behaviour and attendance.

Context

The interim headteacher joined the school in March 2012. She will remain in post until at least August 2013. Around a quarter of the teaching staff have changed since the previous monitoring inspection. A deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher joined the school in September. There have also been several recent appointments at middle leader level.

The quality of teaching

Progress since the last monitoring on the areas for improvement:

- Eliminating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and raising achievement for all groups of students – good

Achievement for most groups of students is rising strongly as a result of improved and more consistent teaching across the range of subject areas. Unvalidated GCSE examination results for 2012 were much better than in 2011. The proportion of students attaining five GCSEs at grades A*–C including English and mathematics rose by 10%. These Year 11 students had made better progress than their peers from the previous year. Students had also made stronger progress in the school's specialist subjects. Senior leaders have analysed this year's examination results accurately. More rigorous and ongoing monitoring of the current students' progress has identified those pupils who are currently at risk of underachievement. Focused intervention work is underway to address the needs of these students.

The proportion of teaching that is good or better has risen discernibly since the last monitoring inspection. Some is outstanding. Only a very small proportion of inadequate teaching remains. The school has recruited well at all levels. New members of staff have settled quickly. Existing staff have embraced the changes

that have been implemented. There is now a real sense in the school of all staff members working as a team.

Teachers are more knowledgeable about their students' needs and interests. They use increasingly accurate information about prior attainment to plan sequences of lessons that are better structured, pacier and usually more challenging. In general, teachers have higher expectations about what students ought to achieve based on an improved understanding of their students' starting points. Unlike at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, little time is now wasted in lessons. Prompt starts are more frequent and students generally arrive at lessons ready to learn.

Students more regularly demonstrate their ability to apply skills and knowledge learnt in previous lessons when tackling new work. Teachers make better use of insight gained from marking and assessment to consolidate those areas where students are less secure. Students also have a much clearer understanding of their personal targets. This is because lesson objectives are usually shared and teachers generally make helpful links between activities and assessment levels or grade descriptors. Nevertheless, in some lessons, the activities do not yet enable students of all abilities to make fast enough progress. This is because teachers do not always explain what specific skills or knowledge the students need to demonstrate if they are to produce work of the very highest quality.

The repertoire of questioning strategies used by teachers has widened. In the very best lessons, this creates a climate of curiosity and discourse in which the students' thinking is challenged. Students spoke very positively about their increased opportunities to collaborate, solve problems and take on responsibility for teaching their peers. In a history lesson, for example, able students supported group members while exploring the impact of the Renaissance on the development of medicine. Talk partners and small group work are now used more routinely to support meaningful opportunities for students to evaluate their own work and the work of their peers. Occasionally, teacher-led question and answer sessions limit opportunities for a wider range of students to consider the issues under discussion.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

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

- Improving the effectiveness of leadership and management and governance – good

The interim headteacher's vision is clear and infectious. The senior leadership team is dynamic, accessible and highly visible around the school. Their determination to secure sustainable improvement is shared by staff and students alike. Members of the interim executive board now ensure that leaders at all levels are held to greater account for improvement through frequent and systematic monitoring.

All senior leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, underpinned by a shared focus on rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Improved tracking and analysis of students' progress ensures leaders have a more accurate view of the performance of different year groups. This has enabled leaders at all levels and teachers to accept greater accountability for the achievement of their students. The school's systems for promoting good behaviour are now well established. Careful monitoring and timely intervention mean that incidents of poor behaviour in lessons or around the school site are becoming rare. Attendance has improved and there are now very few students who are persistently absent. Senior leaders have a very detailed personal understanding of individual students. Nevertheless, some more work needs to be done to ensure that the analysis of outcomes for all groups, including those in receipt of the pupil premium, is systematic and shared more widely with all staff.

A coherent programme of continuing professional development, supported by effective coaching, has enabled teachers to develop their skills quickly in a climate of high expectations and mutual support. Consequently, particular aspects of teaching such as planning, questioning and assessment have all improved. Opportunities for staff to share their expertise and to work collaboratively in 'learning together groups' has ensured that there is more frequent sharing of good practice.

Students are proud to come to the school, which they say has been 'refreshed' and 'brought up to date'. Year 11 students value the increased opportunities they have to take on responsibility and contribute to whole-school decision making. Year 7 students have settled quickly, feel safe and enjoy lessons. Students also spoke very positively about recent changes to timetables, uniform and the school environment. In general, they noted that communication, especially through the school website, has improved greatly. Attendance at information events and the number of parents and carers signed up to 'Parent Mail' has increased significantly. This is enabling parents and carers to become more involved in their children's school experience. Nevertheless, some more work is needed to formalise the evaluation of students' and parental views.

External support

The school and the local authority work well together as a team. The headteacher and divisional manager coordinate external support thoughtfully so that it is well focused, coherent and proportionate. Regular monitoring visits by the local authority provide school leaders with accurate information about the quality of provision. This supports whole-school evaluation. Local authority advisers and teachers from partner schools provide welcome support for specific departments. Subject leaders say these collaborations have enabled them to develop their leadership skills and build more effective teams. Consequently, the quality of middle leadership is improving. The local authority and interim executive board are now rightly focused on securing the substantive longer-term leadership of the school at the earliest time possible.