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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 Ann Short and Steven Smith, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 7–8 November 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 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

Progress since previous monitoring visit – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed. There are no restrictions on the subject areas to which such appointments can be made.

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 second monitoring inspection on 7–8 November 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They observed 29 lessons, including 13 which were jointly observed with school leaders. The lead inspector, along with the headteacher, made some brief drop-in visits to lessons, focusing on behaviour. Inspectors met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, other leaders and staff, members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), local authority representatives, a group 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's post has now been made permanent. The executive headteacher has reduced his time in the school from four days a week to two and a half days. The school has restructured its senior leadership team. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed. One of three deputy headteacher posts remains vacant. Twenty three new teachers started in September 2012. There has been a reduction in the number of students in Year 7 and in the sixth form. The local authority has made a request to the Department for Education to extend the planned timespan of the IEB by one term, to 31 December 2013. A number of improvements have been made to the school environment, for example the refurbished library.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Unvalidated 2012 data indicate improved attainment at the end of Year 11 in almost all key indicators, for example, in the proportions of students gaining five A* to C grades which include English and mathematics. The proportion of students gaining an A* to C grades in some subjects rose significantly, for instance in English language, mathematics and science. There was a slight increase in the proportion of students making expected levels of progress in English and mathematics. The school exceeded national floor standards for students' attainment and progress. Nevertheless, provisional 2012 sixth form results show a slight dip from the previous year. All students who attended other part-time placements gained qualifications, for example in motor vehicle maintenance, construction and hair and beauty.

This picture of improvement across the school is continuing this term for all groups of learners. Students across the school are becoming more confident learners, and are responding well to better teaching.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Teachers are determined to improve their practice; this is captured well by one teacher's comment, 'I want to make students better learners.' Some very strong teaching is evident. However, some pockets of poor practice remain. Teaching is not yet consistently good enough across the school.

Lessons are well structured. Teachers, using a range of resources, plan activities that match students' differing needs and abilities, and capture their interest and engagement. Students respond very well to the many opportunities they have to share ideas, develop their oracy skills and work with each other. In a drama lesson, the teacher and the students explored together, through a range of activities, what the learning objective might be. This was highly effective in bringing the learning to life and engaging the students. Teachers are mostly clear about their expectations and as a result students know what they are expected to do and learn. Where the teaching is better, teachers are confident in their subject area and plan activities which follow a well-thought-out sequence. They use questioning skills to check on students' learning and are flexible enough to adjust their planning during the lesson so that students can keep up. They help students see the link between the quality of their work and examination grades and what they need to do to move up a gear.

Where teaching is not at this level, teachers' explanations lack clarity and as a result the students are not sure what they are expected to learn. In some lessons, teachers do not check sufficiently well on students' understanding, for example, of key terminology. Consequently, they find the work too difficult or they build their learning on basic misconceptions. In some lessons, detailed plans have too many activities and are insufficiently focused on what students are expected to learn. At times, teachers do not push students enough, particularly the more able, to think more deeply and creatively, and take more responsibility for their own learning. The degrees to which students' basic literacy and numeracy skills are being met remain variable. Teachers and other adults are responsive to those students who need extra help. At the same time, there are occasions where this is less effective. For instance, in one lesson, activities were not sufficiently tailored to help a student who was struggling with speaking or understanding English.

Teachers provide regular feedback to students about the quality of their work. However, the quality of feedback is variable and teachers sometimes miss the chance to help students develop their literacy skills. The pointers for improvement are sometimes unclear and it is not always evident how well marking has been followed up.

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

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

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school has reorganised the timetable and built in movement time between lessons. This is having a positive impact on students' punctuality and much less time is being wasted at the start of the lesson. The majority of students are very keen to learn. This was a strikingly common feature in lessons. When some students become restless and resort to doodling or daydreaming, it is often because the teaching is less engaging or relevant. Students appreciate the greater emphasis on how well they are learning and they feel more comfortable in approaching adults for help. Students' eagerness to learn can also be seen in attendance levels which continue to improve, and are currently at 94.2% which is above average.

Mutual respect is evident at all levels within the school. Students say that behaviour has improved and there are fewer arguments. Teachers set clear expectations and boundaries for behaviour and students welcome this. Students feel valued and involved in the school. Their views are listened to and help shape improvements in the school, such as in the library. They said they would like even more study areas, because the library is popular and tends to get crowded.

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

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

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher continues to provide resolute and insightful leadership on all fronts. She is highly visible around the school and has gained the respect of parents and carers, students and staff. Changes to the leadership team are having substantial impact across the school. The building blocks for school improvement are now firmly in place and a 'can do' culture and vision is evident at all levels. For instance, leaders and the IEB are implementing a new performance management policy with well-defined lines of accountability. Salary progression is clearly linked with the performance of staff in improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for students.

The staff comment positively on the new leadership structure and the quality of support they are receiving. Improvements to the quality of teaching are directly linked to the comprehensive programme of training which is now in place and which is tailored to meet the specific needs of different staff, including newly qualified teachers. Leaders systematically and regularly monitor the quality of teaching. They are setting high but realistic expectations. The emphasis is on putting in appropriate support for those staff who need to improve their practice, but if necessary they are using the capability process.

Leaders are taking action to address shortcomings, although there is further work to be done in these areas. For instance, assessment procedures are more rigorous and

a seven-week learning and assessment cycle has been put into place. Better data are available, although there remains some variability in how well staff are using them. A start has been made on reviewing and improving the quality of the sixth form. Changes to the entry requirements to courses, while reducing student numbers, have ensured that students are starting out on more appropriate courses. A literacy policy is in place across the school but is not yet being consistently implemented through all subjects. A common approach to the teaching of numeracy across subjects is at a very early stage of development.

The IEB continues to be hugely supportive through the wealth of expertise its members bring. They are supportive and challenging in equal measure. They use their considerable experience and skill to great effect, for instance in developing the capacity of middle leaders. Parents, carers and students are positive about the improvements being made. Parents and carers appreciate the emphasis being given to attendance and uniform, but would welcome a little more information about how well the school is doing in helping their children with their learning.

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

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

External support

Partners continue to provide very valuable and appropriate support. The range of support adds capacity to the school in a way which complements its growing internal strengths. This is reflected in a variety of ways, not least the skilful leadership of the executive headteacher. He works in a seamless way with the headteacher to drive the improvement journey with rigour and determination. The capacity of the senior leadership team has been enhanced by increased time from two skilled professionals; one who supports literacy developments and the other whose is adding strength to the school's strategic management of behaviour and intervention.

The local authority provides beneficial advice and guidance through its acting lead education professional and through a recent appointment of a very experienced consultant who has started to support a number of developments, including in the sixth form. The close family of Ealing secondary schools continues to help with evaluating the quality of teaching. Support from Brentside High School is proving invaluable in improving the quality of the school's assessment data. Practitioners from Brentside High School support the school's training programme and the leadership of a few departments.