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3 December 2012

Ms Kaye Palmer-Greene
Interim headteacher
Bristol Gateway School
Long Cross
Lawrence Weston
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Dear Ms Palmer-Greene

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bristol Gateway School

Following my visit to your school on 29-30 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 fifth 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 – satisfactory

One newly-qualified teacher may be appointed to a specialist subject.

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's Services for the City of Bristol.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of students' learning, progress and attendance.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - have sufficient subject knowledge
 - tailor work to the individual needs of students
 - apply consistent behaviour management and deploy additional adults effectively.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum so that there is sufficient coverage and progression in all subjects.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - reviewing the current structure and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of leaders, including governors
 - providing appropriate professional development so that all leaders play a full part in accurately monitoring the school's performance and driving improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Bristol Gateway School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 29-30 November 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior staff, teaching and non-teaching staff, two groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and an officer from the local authority. Parts of nine lessons were observed. The provision and achievements for students educated off-site was not observed on this visit.

Context

Following the planned departure of the executive headteacher and acting headteacher, a new, interim headteacher started at the school in September. Plans for the school to become an academy are taking longer than expected and a sponsor has not yet been identified. There are new leaders for assessment, English, Key Stage 4 and Cashmore House. There are two new members of the governing body. The local authority continues to retain financial responsibility.

There are 63 students on roll. Two students attend alternative provision at Rock Steady on a full-time basis and two students in Year 11 attend the college full time. Cashmore House, which reopened in October provides for up to eight students for short periods of time. For some, this is as an alternative to exclusion.

Achievement of pupils at the school

No additional work has been undertaken to evaluate the quality of students' achievements for the end of the last academic year. A new set of assessments were completed in October for English, mathematics and science and raised questions about the accuracy of some of the previous information on students' achievements. The system to track students' progress is being revised and this work is not yet complete. Targets have been set based on the new assessments and are not sufficiently linked to the amount of progress that students are expected to make at the end of each year or key stage. As a result, teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and the governing body do not have access to a complete set of information to inform their work. Nevertheless, the new set of assessments has been used well by senior leaders to identify students for additional support for reading and spelling, and by teachers to plan work that is appropriate to students' individual targets.

The first set of reassessments indicates that most students present for the tests have made at least expected progress since September in English, mathematics and science. Initial results following the introduction of a systematic approach for teaching reading and spelling are encouraging, suggesting that some students have

made significant gains in their reading skills in a short period of time. It is noticeable in lessons that students are more confident to read aloud and practise their skills. It is too early to judge improvements in spelling.

Students' achievement in lessons in all subjects is increasingly good because teaching is better, there is less staff absence and students' attitudes to work are very positive. Work in books provides a better record of students' achievements and, for most, the work is completed and neatly set out. Inevitably, the progress of students with low levels of attendance is inadequate. Year 7 students attend well but too many students in other year groups still do not attend school frequently enough.

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

- Urgently improve the quality of students' learning, progress and attendance – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

There has been a significant shift in the quality of teaching. More good teaching, confirmed in lesson observations by the school and local authority, and from recent work in students' books, means that students' make better progress. Teachers' increased confidence seen at the previous monitoring visit has been maintained and staff have risen to the challenge of the new headteacher to raise the quality of teaching further. An important factor in this is that staff routinely and consistently challenge students to meet higher expectations for work and behaviour. The consistency that students were asking for in managing their behaviour is now securely in place. Similarly, teachers' good subject knowledge, appropriate use of support staff and increasing use of computers are common features in most lessons.

Teachers provide students with a much better idea of how well they are doing. This is because assessments and lesson plans are used to make sure that work is at the right level for individual students, and teachers' marking is more helpful in letting students know how to do better. Students know what their targets are, what level they are working at and how they can get to the next level. In some lessons, not enough of students' learning is recorded in their books for future use. Sometimes this is because teachers talk too much; giving students too little time to show what they can do independently. In other lessons it is because it is the students who talk too much as a way of avoiding putting their thought to paper, and teachers do not stop discussions soon enough. Presentation of students' work in books is sometimes let down by inconsistent expectations and guidelines for how to set work out.

Opportunities for students to learn collaboratively are not well developed, although there are examples where students are very capable of working together to share ideas and improve their work as a result. For example, good opportunities for

reflection and examples by the teacher enabled Year 8 students to help one another to improve skills on the trampoline very well.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Some of the behaviour seen on this visit is impressive in comparison to previous visits and the school has definitely turned a corner in managing students' behaviour. The good work in raising expectations for staff and students over the past year has been maintained and extended further with high expectations in place from the outset for this academic year. Significantly, inappropriate behaviour is no longer a barrier to students' learning in class. Students made it very clear during this visit that they know where they stand, they like the increased expectations and consistent management of their behaviour and say that Gateway is a 'proper' school now. The system of rewards and sanctions is strictly reinforced and is seen by students as fair. Students are expected to wear the new school uniform.

Occasionally staff expect too little of students, such as not insisting that they have the equipment that they need, or talking things through too much before insisting that students get on with the work independently. Staff do not need to do this. When students have a clear understanding of how to complete a task they become resilient and resourceful when they make mistakes or when they have to wait for help, as seen in a Year 10 information and communication technology lesson.

Year 8 students, who had a poor induction to the school last year, have made a good start to this academic year, including better attendance and much better attitudes to work. Attendance rates for some students, particularly those in Years 9 to 11 are stubbornly slow to improve. However, improvements to teaching, the curriculum, students' behaviour and the way that non-attendance is followed up are no longer reasons why students would choose to be absent. The incidence of significantly disruptive behaviour continues to decline, as does the rate of exclusions.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Once again staff are managing the constant changes very well. They have confidence in the new headteacher and have risen to her high expectations that they can and will improve their skills further. Staff morale is high and the new academic year has got off to a good start. The governing body are also very confident about the future and in their ability to challenge the areas that will make the most difference. For example, following weaknesses identified in assessment, governors established a group to look more closely at information on students' progress.

Significant changes in some areas of leadership mean that the difference that the work of some senior and middle leaders makes to the school's work is yet to be proven. This is particularly the case for assessment, English, Key Stage 4, special educational needs and the off-site provision at Cashmore House. Many of the changes to policy and practice in these areas are very new. Nevertheless, in areas where improved practice has been built upon since the last visit, the difference is clear, such as good improvement to teaching and students' behaviour.

Leaders carry out a range of activities to check teaching and students' learning, and they have very sensibly used external partners to verify their findings. But leaders do not pull the information together well enough to make judgements about the strengths and weaknesses of students' achievements, whether the actions are the right ones or whether students' achievements are good enough.

Changes to the curriculum mean that Year 9 students have more course options and other year groups benefit too. Graphics and hair and beauty have been added onsite, and off-site courses are available for motor vehicle maintenance and construction. National examinations for other subjects are about to start, such as GCSEs for Mandarin and food technology. After-school clubs have just started. Cashmore House reopened over the past few weeks and over the past two months a programme for reading and spelling has been introduced.

The school environment has been improved further inside the building. There is now a library, new classroom furniture and many areas have been redecorated. The school has been brightened up considerably by the display of students' art work.

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

- Improve leadership and management – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum so that there is sufficient coverage and progression in all subjects – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority is, quite appropriately, looking at taking a step back in its support so that the school increasingly manages its own affairs. Nevertheless, a strong monitoring role continues and, through its Progress Review Group meetings, is helping the governing body and the headteacher to focus on the areas of highest priority, such as assessment and holding all staff to account. The local authority has supported the school well in the changes in senior leadership enabling a smooth start to this academic year. The local authority and headteacher have worked together to produce a new, single action plan. The plan is overly detailed and requires greater clarity in that objectives are set and how actions are measured.