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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 Daniel Burton, Her Majesty's Inspector and Cliff Mainey, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13–14 March 2013, 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 third 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 – good

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 by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders and governors communicate high expectations and an explicit vision for improvement that is clearly understood by staff, parents 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 third monitoring inspection on 13–14 March 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They observed 20 lessons, including 13 joint observations with school leaders. Inspectors met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, other leaders and staff, members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), local authority representatives, two groups of students and a group of parents. They also spoke informally with staff and students.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a deputy headteacher has been seconded for two terms with lead responsibility for improving the quality of teaching practice. A director of literacy has been appointed and subject leaders have been appointed in media and music. The IEB is extending its oversight until 31 December 2013.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students continue to make better progress than before because they are exposed to more consistently good teaching on a daily basis. They are more confident learners and they respond well to the increased opportunities they have to assess their own work and that of their classmates. In a Year 11 English lesson, students responded brilliantly to the chance to work together as they analysed the structural devices used in Steinbeck's novel 'Of Mice and Men'. There was a palpable buzz as they shared their ideas, responded to each other's comments and fed back to the teacher. In a Year 13 economics lesson, they engaged in high-level discussions about how to accelerate economic growth in China. This problem-solving approach enabled them to apply their learning to a real-life example using complex and technical language very confidently. These increased opportunities to work together increase students' self-confidence and enthusiasm to learn.

Students have a better understanding of their targets and how they are getting on in achieving them. Students in Year 11 and in the sixth form are on track to achieve challenging attainment targets and in some instances exceed them. The gap in attainment between students eligible for free school meals and other students is closing.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Positive rapport between teachers and students is commonplace in lessons. In the majority of lessons, teachers draw on more secure assessment information to plan lessons that better engage students' interest. As a result, students enjoy their learning and play a full part in well-planned

and structured activities. Where teaching is most effective, the learning activities are carefully structured around a key theme or question and become increasingly challenging as the lesson progresses. In these lessons, students have good opportunities to work things out for themselves. Teachers ask questions which test students' understanding and deepen their thinking. It also helps teachers adjust the pace and focus of activities. Teachers provide some well-constructed opportunities for students to share ideas and solve problems through paired and group discussion. This was evident in a Year 8 English lesson where students were able to write poems by applying their knowledge of the rhyming scheme.

In a number of different subjects, such as history and business studies, teachers make good use of opportunities to help students develop their literacy skills. The development of numeracy skills is less evident across the range of subjects. The development of their communication skills is variable. In some lessons students were confident and articulate in the way they contributed to discussions. This helped them develop their speaking and listening skills. In other lessons, students were hesitant and unsure in sharing their ideas and in contributing fully to group and paired discussion. There were missed opportunities for sixth form students to develop their verbal skills and work things out for themselves.

In some lessons, students remain too passive. In these lessons, teaching lacks pace and challenge and does not engage students' interest well enough. Students are overly dependent on the teacher. This slows the pace of learning, particularly when teachers' expectations are too low about the quality and quantity of work students must complete. The support provided by teaching assistants is variable. On occasions this is because they have not been given enough direction in knowing how to support students' learning. Teachers provide helpful and developmental written comments in students' books. However, students do not routinely respond to these comments and it is not clear if the marking is helping them to improve their work.

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 – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour and attitude to learning continue to be a positive feature. A number of factors contribute to this positive picture. Behaviour policies are clear and are consistently applied by staff, and with an appropriate balance of sanctions and rewards. Arrangements for carrying out and recording safeguarding checks on staff are secure. Students show respect for each other and the teacher as they share and discuss their ideas in lessons. Occasionally, a small number of students in different classes rely too much on the teacher to move their learning along and are slow to share their ideas or engage fully in group activities.

Most students arrive to their lessons on time and move along purposefully during lesson changeovers. Their willingness to engage and participate in learning is reflected in attendance levels which continue to be above average. Attendance in the sixth form is not as high as elsewhere in the school. Staff follow up individual absences of sixth form students. However, systems for monitoring attendance patterns in the sixth form are not thorough enough to enable leaders to measure the impact of their action plan.

Despite a much tighter system for managing students' behaviour, exclusions have reduced, when compared with the same period last year. Students are responding very well to the new rewards policy. The wide range of awards is linked extremely well to better levels of attainment and attendance and this motivates the students. They speak favourably about the 'warning system' and the opportunity to have 'positive resolution' meetings with members of staff. These meetings help students to reflect on their actions and identify any changes they need to make. This sharpens their moral and social awareness.

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 determined and strong leadership. This is grounded in a clear vision which she communicates effectively to staff, parents and students. Parents comment favourably on the better communication with them. Restructuring of the senior leadership team has been completed. Senior leaders have clear roles and expectations set by the headteacher and executive headteacher. The development of middle leaders is underway although it is less advanced. There is now a strong emphasis on ensuring consistency of practice across all levels of management and practice.

Strategies to improve the quality of teaching are effective and the pace of change has been accelerated and strengthened through the appointment of a seconded deputy headteacher. Tailored support is provided for teachers who need additional help to improve their practice, together with a new programme which enables the best teachers to experiment with new approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers have benefited from good quality professional development, for example in the use of questioning and assessment. Teachers welcome the fact that training opportunities are more specific, focused and practical than before. Teachers, even the more effective, are keen to develop their practice further and are constantly open to new ideas and developmental feedback. Subject leaders are increasingly involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. A programme of subject reviews has begun, starting with science and technology.

The comprehensive and very detailed sixth form plan articulates an ambitious and appropriate vision and set of priorities. The level of detail and the range of activities confirm how much there is to do. Some teachers in the sixth form are not as clear as they could be about the rationale behind the plan or how it can help them improve students' learning. While the plan lacks precise criteria in helping leaders to evaluate success, a good start has been made in putting the plan into action.

There are tighter systems in place to hold staff to account and more effective strategies to support them. Explicit links are made between performance and salary progression and those with extra responsibility are now being held to account for how they are exercising this. Information collected on students' progress is increasingly more accurate and staff have now received training in how to make best use of it when assessing it. This information is being used more consistently in Key Stage 4 than in the sixth form or in Key Stage 3.

The IEB members continue to bring their considerable experience to bear in ensuring that the impetus for improvement remains on track. They are highly reflective and strategic, and have an excellent knowledge of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. They are very measured in their deliberations as to what is in the best interests of the school's future direction. For instance, they are aware of the importance of handing over to other governors smoothly and are giving this very careful consideration. Despite continuing improvements, senior leaders and IEB members accurately recognise there is still more work to do particularly in relation to middle management and the sixth form.

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

External support continues to be of a high quality. It is focused appropriately on the aspects which will be of most help and is proportionate to the growing capacity within the school. Senior link advisers contribute very effectively by providing an external perspective and evaluation on the quality of teaching. They have also contributed well to the strategic development of the sixth form. The executive headteacher continues to work jointly with the headteacher. They are successful in ensuring that the pace of improvement does not let up. Aided by support from the local authority, the senior leadership has been restructured effectively. Staff from Brentside High School continue to provide high quality support in a number of areas, not least in securing more reliable and accurate data about students' achievement. The family of Ealing schools plays its part through its contribution to reviews on the quality of learning and teaching. The review undertaken in February 2013 affirms the school's own evaluation of its strengths, and accurately identifies teaching that is not yet good enough.