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14 March 2013

Mr L Willday
Executive Headteacher
St John's Wood Community School
Longridge
Knutsford
Cheshire
WA16 8PA

Dear Mr Willday

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John's Wood Community School

Following my visit to your school on 13 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Strategic Director - Children, Families and Adults for Cheshire East.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2012

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and improve the achievement of all students, particularly in mathematics and science, at both key stages by:
 - undertaking clear baseline assessments and identifying ambitious targets for individuals which are monitored on a regular basis
 - more rigorously assessing students' progress and analysing data so that any necessary interventions can be put in place at an early stage
 - improving the curriculum to broaden access to a range of curriculum pathways and increased opportunities to achieve awards
 - raising staff's expectations of the standard and amount of work individual students should produce
 - ensuring lessons are planned to take account of the different abilities and incorporate teaching strategies that make learning more lively and engaging for students
 - involving students more in understanding what they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve the school's leadership and management and hence its capacity to sustain improvement by:
 - finalising and fully implementing the local authority's plans to strengthen school leadership, by the end of October 2012
 - acting on the improvements identified in the school's recent more robust self-evaluation by drawing up an action plan which sets clear measurable targets
 - rigorously monitoring teaching and setting performance management targets which are linked to improved outcomes for students
 - sharing best practice in assessment through moderation with other providers.
- Improve governance by
 - Raising the awareness of members of the governing body of the importance of their role in holding the school's leaders to account
 - increasing governors' knowledge and understanding of their roles so that they can carry them out effectively.
- Secure improvements in behaviour and reduce the number of exclusions both from school and lessons by:
 - implementing a whole-school approach to the management of behaviour which is consistently applied
 - developing a more individualised approach to planning for the management of behaviour which improves students' capacity to manage their own behaviour and successfully promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
 - improving the curriculum to better meet students' interests so that they are motivated to participate in lessons and to attend school, particularly in Year 11.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 March 2013.

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, other nominated staff from the school and federation of schools and the Chair of the Governing Body. Informal conversations were held with students during the day.

Context

Since the last inspection, one senior leader has left the school. Three assistant headteachers have been appointed from within the school on a temporary basis to take responsibility for specific improvement priorities. A special educational needs coordinator has also been appointed from within the staff. Three teaching assistants from within the school have applied successfully to undertake training as Higher Level Teaching Assistants. At present, an assistant headteacher from within the federation is providing additional leadership capacity for two days per week. During this inspection, the headteacher was absent from school owing to a short-term illness.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students are benefiting from a radical overhaul of the curriculum that has extended and enriched their learning experience at the school since January. Personalised timetables include a suitable focus on core subjects, including English, mathematics and science, as well as providing more options with alternative provision and work experience. While it is too soon to evaluate the impact of these changes, early indications suggest that students' engagement in learning is improving as they see greater relevance and value in what the school has to offer.

Improvements in students' behaviour mean that learning is disrupted less frequently. In the most effective lessons observed during this inspection, students made good progress where teachers engaged them actively in relevant tasks that captured their interest, provided new challenges and enabled them to draw upon their own experiences and prior knowledge to extend their learning. For example, in a Year 7 geography lesson, students worked as a group to recall the hierarchy for settlements and applied this previous learning well in completing a practical activity about different types of retail outlet. However, learning slows where lessons are directed too much by the teacher or where activities do not inspire because they offer too little challenge. At times, the teacher's intervention limits opportunities for students to have time to think for themselves or solve the problem they are working on.

Leaders are currently developing a system to track students' progress more effectively. Recent assessments provide a more reliable picture of students' current attainment and data have proved useful, for example, in targeting specific support to

improve standards in reading. However, staff have recognised that some earlier baseline assessment information that informed initial target setting may not have been wholly accurate. This means that it is currently difficult to see whether students' progress is accelerating across all subjects. Plans are in place to review targets after the forthcoming assessment cycle to ensure that students are being challenged sufficiently. Leaders are also taking suitable steps to track the progress made by students participating in alternative provision offsite.

The quality of teaching

Students and staff are becoming accustomed to the shorter teaching period which has been introduced since January. A whole-school focus on lesson planning has helped focus teachers' attention on students' individual learning needs and the contribution to be made by teaching assistants to increase the pace of learning. Scrutiny of weekly planning sheets by the assistant headteacher responsible for teaching and learning has identified some common areas for staff development, for example, in the setting of learning objectives.

Teachers are becoming better informed about the learning needs of their students. Individual student progress sheets are under development and individual learning plans have been produced for almost all students. This information is being used more routinely to inform lesson planning. However, leaders recognise that further work is needed to ensure that teaching is pitched at the right level to challenge all students and that targeted interventions are appropriate.

Where teaching is more effective, activities are tailored well to meet students' individual needs and promote greater independence. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, students worked well as a group, reading aloud their roles in a play with confidence and expression and then writing the final scene together. In a Year 8 art lesson, students focused well on producing pictures of a woodland landscape as part of a 'horror theme' they had chosen to study. They benefited from adults modelling the use of oil pastels to develop a three dimensional effect in their pictures which they assessed at the end of the lesson. Teaching was less effective where teachers talked for too long or provided too much support so that students were not stretched or challenged. Occasionally, particularly in Key Stage 4 classes, teachers posed a question and then, too quickly, gave away the answer. In these instances, students became passive and it was unclear what they were actually learning from the activity. Opportunities were also missed in lessons for students to reflect on their learning and consider what had gone well in their work, any challenges they had faced and how they might improve. The quality of marking is mixed and, while some examples were seen where teachers had offered helpful guidance on how to improve, there was little evidence that students had responded to the suggestions given.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved since the last inspection although leaders acknowledge that 'some days are better than others'. During the inspection, none of the seven lessons observed were interrupted by poor behaviour. Staff managed low-level disruptions consistently and calmly so that learning could proceed. Students' attitudes to learning remain variable and often reflect the quality of teaching. Where teaching is lively and provides challenge, students interact with adults and their peers more openly and with interest. Equally, the students become passive or bored where too little is expected of them or where they do not see the value in what they are learning.

Students have been given greater responsibility for managing their own behaviour, for example, in getting to lessons punctually and in leaving the school in an orderly fashion at the end of the day. The dining area has also been improved, offering more pleasant surroundings for students to meet socially at lunchtimes. Students' positive response to these developments is reflected in a much calmer environment about the school. The number of recorded incidents of students choosing to leave their lessons or being removed by staff due to poor behaviour has dropped dramatically since January. There has been no incident which required the need for physical restraint.

Dedicated time for students to meet with their form tutors has been extended as part of the curriculum restructure. This is allowing tutors to forge stronger relationships with students and extend links with families. Consequently, staff are gaining a better understanding of the more complex needs of some students. This, in turn, is enabling leaders to tailor a broader range of alternative provision for individual students to capture their interest and prevent them becoming disengaged from learning. Older students are also participating in life-skills classes to build their self-confidence as they prepare to move on from the school to further education, training or employment.

While there have been improvements in behaviour, students' overall attendance remains low. Leaders follow up individual absences routinely and check students' attendance at alternative providers on a daily basis. Staff know that a number of students attend school regularly and that a few students may be contributing to a high proportion of recorded absences. However, attendance data are not currently analysed in depth to highlight good attendance, to establish trends over time, or to determine the reasons why the overall picture has not improved over the last year.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

School leadership has been strengthened and developed further since the last inspection. The headteacher has been very effective in harnessing the potential of staff to take up new roles as leaders of school improvement. Leaders' responsibilities are clear. For example, the deputy headteacher has led the effective review and

restructure of the school curriculum and newly appointed assistant headteachers have begun to implement plans that focus on key priorities outlined in the action plan. The special educational needs coordinator has been instrumental in ensuring that individual learning plans are prepared for all students. Consequently, during the headteacher's recent absence from school, the momentum for change has not slowed.

The executive headteacher of the federation continues to provide strong leadership and support for the school. Links established between staff of the three schools are proving effective in sharing good practice and providing targeted support for staff to improve their practice. Assistant headteachers have also led staff training on aspects of teaching, assessment and behaviour. Most staff have responded positively to the changes in the expectations of leaders and morale has improved.

During a period when there have been many actions taken and changes made, regular checks are made by leaders to ensure that deadlines set out in the school improvement plan are met. However, a systematic approach to evaluate the impact of training and support on the quality of teaching has not yet been established. Furthermore, a simple means by which to store and retrieve information being gathered about students' current attainment and progress has not been developed. Consequently, it is not easy at present for leaders to evaluate the progress they are making or to prioritise future planning in their drive for improvement.

The structure of the governing body has been reviewed and the Chair of the Governing Body has adopted a team approach to governance so that responsibilities for different aspects are shared more widely. Links between governors and senior leaders have been established to improve understanding of different aspects of the school's work. Refresher training is also planned to enable governors, especially those who are new to their role, to understand even more fully the contribution that they can make in holding the school to account.

External support

Good levels of support provided through the federation of schools are proving to be effective in promoting improvement. Additional consultant support commissioned by the school provides an objective overview of progress made in tackling key priorities. Officers from the local authority provide an external view in monitoring the progress made by the school in meeting targets set out in the improvement plan. A local authority representative is due to make a presentation to governors in the near future to help strengthen governance further.

Priorities for further improvement are to:

- introduce a systematic approach to observing teaching in order to share best practice and evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve students' learning

- develop systems that enable information about students' learning needs, attainment, achievement and attendance to be used more effectively by leaders to evaluate progress made and inform future planning.