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Dr Tawanda Madhlangobe
Seabrook College
Burr Hill Chase
Prittlewell
Southend-on-Sea
SS2 6PE

Dear Dr Madhlangobe

Special measures monitoring inspection of Seabrook College

Following my visit to your school on 3–4 December 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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 that the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

A newly qualified teacher may 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 Interim Executive Board, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Southend.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Henry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise achievement and attainment in English, mathematics and science by ensuring the school has robust attainment-on-entry data against which to set challenging targets and plan students' learning.
- Raise the quality of teaching so that it is at least good by:
 - developing the expertise of the teaching staff
 - ensuring that lessons take full account of students' prior learning and what they need to do next
 - identifying sharp and precise objectives for learning in every lesson
 - making greater reference to students' targets in lessons and ensuring staff are able to mark work effectively so that students know how to improve
 - planning activities that are challenging, stimulating and relevant to students' needs
 - giving students more opportunities to make decisions about their learning and to use their initiative
 - ensuring that students complete independent work that this is of a high standard and reducing an over-reliance on worksheets
 - ensuring that teachers and support staff have consistently high expectations of what students should achieve in lessons.
- Strengthen leadership, management and governance by:
 - pursuing a clear strategic direction for the school and ensuring that all staff agree and implement actions wholeheartedly
 - ensuring the creation of a suitably skilled and qualified middle leadership team, and providing mentoring and training so that they make a more significant contribution to monitoring provision and outcomes
 - holding teachers more robustly to account for their students' progress supporting senior capacity in the longer term
 - ensuring all adults have a clear understanding of students' social and behavioural needs.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3–4 December 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher of the newly federated college, senior and middle leaders, the Chairs of the Interim Executive Board and the Governing Body, and three representatives from the local authority. Time was spent observing students in their lessons and around the school to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the students' behaviour and safety. The inspector also met two members of the new student council and spoke with two parents.

Context

The school became part of Seabrook College in October 2013. The formation of the college follows reorganisation of Southend's provision for students who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The college is a federation that also includes the local authority's pupil referral unit. A headteacher for the school has now taken up post, following interim arrangements that had been in place since prior to the inspection in June 2012. An executive headteacher for the federation is also now in post. The interim executive board remains in place to provide governance for the school. This board also now contributes to the new governing body for the federated college.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Progress in the lessons observed continues to improve as a result of better quality teaching. A more rigorous procedure to assess what students know, understand and can do provides teachers with the information they require to meet more effectively their needs. However, there remain lessons where this information is not used well enough for all groups of students. Assessment of progress since the previous monitoring inspection shows encouraging improvements. Predicted outcomes in GCSE examinations indicate an improvement from previous results.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved. As a result, students are learning more effectively; they are becoming increasingly confident in their abilities and are taking responsibility for their own learning.

In the most successful lessons, teachers consider very carefully what they want each student to learn. They plan lessons that start with an activity that catches all of the students' interest, whatever their level of attainment. Teachers skilfully recap on the previous lesson to establish whether they need to go through some of this again.

They then continue with further work that matches well with students' learning objectives. In these lessons, teachers do not try to cover too much ground as this can leave students confused and the main learning objectives unmet. Teachers monitor rigorously how well students are learning and adjust the lesson accordingly. Where an opportunity arises, for example from a comment or question from a student, they have the subject knowledge and confidence to veer away from their planned activities in order to deepen students' understanding. Teaching assistants know exactly what the learning objectives are for each student and encourage them to work conscientiously.

In these successful lessons the impact of staff training on effective questioning is clear. Questioning is increasingly seen as a crucial way of establishing what students know and the basis for providing prompts, but not simply answers, to developing their thinking and learning. Students again commented that they felt they were getting the help they needed to make progress. There is now an impressive display of the high quality of their work on display in classrooms and around the school.

The improvements made in lesson planning have also enabled teachers and teaching assistants to be more effective in improving behaviour, enabling a low-key approach to encourage successfully students to concentrate on their work. An example of the substantial development that has taken place since the first monitoring inspection is the extent to which students will take part in discussions with one another, including explaining why they hold a different point of view. These discussions show maturity and self-confidence.

There remain, however, inconsistencies in some lessons that need to be addressed for teaching to be at least good overall. In these lessons, the elements of the most effective lessons, as detailed above, are not always in place. For example, occasionally staff still do too much for their students, including giving overly directive help or even answers, when they are having difficulty; and in providing them with resources that they can easily get for themselves. In addition, the marking of students' work frequently contains a general comment that does not provide guidance to students to help them improve further. As such, the important teaching opportunity provided by marking is missed; for example, in identifying what exactly was good in a particular piece of work, and in ensuring that comments made about what could be improved are followed up in the next lesson. Too little use is made of the interactive whiteboards to support learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Attendance remains too low and remains a substantial challenge for the school and local authority. There has been success in improving a small number of students' attendance. However, the overall level remains too low, at around 70 per cent, and even when the most persistent non-attending students are taken into account this only rises to about 80 per cent. Efforts to improve on this situation include

broadening the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to provide a more personalised approach that the students feel is more relevant and valuable for their future. Further attention is required in working with parents especially, but not only, at the time when students start at the school.

The standard of behaviour seen during the monitoring inspection was good. The school was calm and there was an appropriate secondary school working atmosphere. Evidence from the school's monitoring of behaviour over time shows continued improvements with fewer occasions when difficulties arise and interruptions in learning occur. Students feel safe; they do not feel there is a significant amount of bullying and know that if they have concerns that they will be addressed effectively. Parents have similar feelings of confidence for their children.

The improvement in behaviour has been helped by the improvement in the quality of teaching, and the consequent feelings of success that students have about their learning. In addition, there are now far more opportunities for students to develop their social skills and improve relationships with one another and with staff outside of lessons, including the breakfast club, and break and lunchtime activities.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school has a permanent leadership team for the first time since before the inspection in June 2012. The headteacher of the school and executive headteacher of the college are providing clear direction for further development and have rapidly gained the confidence of students and staff. They have already introduced changes that are continuing the journey of improvement led by the previous interim leadership arrangements. The headteacher and executive headteacher are very aware of the importance of the contribution required from all staff if the school is to reach the highest levels of quality and meet its students' needs as well as possible. To this end, they are considering carefully how all staff can both share their areas of expertise and play a full role in the school's development. Improvement in the quality of teaching, to ensure consistently high standards, remains central to this journey.

The new school council has only been in place for a short time but has made a rapid and important contribution to the school's improvement. For example, the council has worked with school leaders to review the students' code of conduct and has agreed this with the other students. It has successfully represented other students in their request for older students to be allowed off-site at lunchtime and has worked with the executive headteacher to introduce healthy break time snacks.

The interim executive board continues to provide governance for the school, including rigorous challenge and support to the leadership team for the school's improvement. The board also contributes its very valuable experience and expertise to the new governing body for the federated college. The governing body is rightly

considering how this experience and expertise can continue to contribute in the longer term, after the role of the interim executive board has been successfully completed.

External support

The local authority has continued its high level of commitment to support the school's improvement. It provides high levels of expertise and senior officer involvement. The contribution of support to the programme to improve the quality of teaching continues to be effective. The local authority has worked closely with the school to improve students' attendance where this is unsatisfactory. Overall attendance, however, remains stubbornly too low and a broader range of approaches is required, including working more closely with parents.