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17 January 2014

Mrs Geralyn Wilson
Interim Executive Headteacher
The Mandeville School Specialist Sports College
Ellen Road
Aylesbury
HP21 8ES

Dear Mrs Wilson

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Mandeville School Specialist Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 16 January 2014, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a representative from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, and the senior leadership team. I visited a range of lessons with you to observe teaching and talk to students. I evaluated the combined local authority statement of action and school improvement plan. I reviewed the single central register of staff.

Context

Since the inspection, the governing body has been replaced with an interim executive board (IEB), which met for the first time the day before this monitoring visit. There have been no significant changes in staff. The IEB has stated its intention to consult on the future status of the school, including whether or not it becomes a sponsored academy.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The executive headteacher has had a significant impact on the school since taking up her post just prior to the inspection. She has created a strong sense of shared ambition and responsibility for the rapid improvement of the school. Her drive, professionalism, and belief in both students and staff is boosting morale and building confidence. She has quickly built effective working relationships with the newly formed IEB, the local authority and senior leaders. These parties have a shared understanding of what is required to move the school forward quickly. The combined school and local authority action plan identifies appropriate actions and timescales for the development of good teaching and achievement.

The IEB is made up of highly skilled professionals, who bring a considerable wealth of experience and expertise to the school. Having only just met, they have not had time to implement plans; nonetheless they instil confidence, through their clear-sighted analysis of the school's weaknesses, and their grasp of the depth and scale of change required.

Senior leaders accept their responsibility for the school's past failings, but are determined to play their part in its future success. They relish the new leadership and direction, which they feel have freed them to make a greater and more influential contribution to improvement. There is emerging evidence of better tracking and monitoring of the progress students are making, particularly with GCSE English and mathematics. This is being used to consider where best to target extra revision, or which examination to tackle and when. Almost every student in a small cohort which entered GCSE English early achieved their target grades.

Senior leaders are convincingly passionate and committed to high achievement and excellent teaching. However, they have yet to prove that they can deliver this at the rate and to the standard required to remove the school from special measures. The executive headteacher is determined to give every member of staff the opportunity to prove their capability, but agrees with the inspector that this cannot take too long. Improvement must be rapid, consistent across all areas, and sustained.

Teachers are also re-energised by the challenge facing them and communicate an ambition and determination for the school to succeed. They are working hard to act on advice and training to make learning more engaging, demanding and active. However, there is a danger that a focus on what the teacher is doing could lead to too prescriptive an approach to classroom practice. School leaders recognise that they must focus their efforts on ensuring that students are learning effectively; teachers need to adapt their practice to make sure of this, using an appropriate style of teaching which is fit for purpose with each particular class or group. Records of checks on teaching in the month after the inspection appear optimistic in such a short time, suggesting that a sharper focus on learning is needed.

The Buckinghamshire Learning Trust has acted effectively to support the school, by engaging the services of the interim executive headteacher, by replacing the governing body with an IEB and by meeting the costs of a range of consultancy aimed at improving teaching and achievement. A monitoring officer works closely with the school and a senior officer is a member of the monitoring board, which meets regularly to gauge progress against the improvement plan.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

- The combined local authority statement of action and school improvement plan is fit for purpose.
- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector