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7 May 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 with Colin Lower and Gill Walley, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 7 and 8 May, 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 October 2013. 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. The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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, the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is good or better in all subjects, by making sure that:
 - all teachers have the highest expectations of what students are capable of achieving
 - teachers ensure that work is accurately matched to the skills and abilities of all students throughout the lesson
 - work is regularly and accurately marked, so that students are clear how well they have done and what they need to do to improve
 - all teachers give students regular opportunities to be regular participants in lessons.

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - involving all leaders and governors in a thorough review of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and using this information to implement a clear plan for improvement that includes challenging, measurable targets and timescales
 - organising the school's programme for checking the quality of teaching so that it is coherent and consistent, and brings about rapid improvements in teaching
 - ensuring that leaders of subjects, particularly English, mathematics and science, understand the strengths and weaknesses of their subject area, and take effective action to bring about rapid improvement in achievement and teaching
 - ensuring improvement plans are clear, have specific outcomes and include interim measures against which progress can be regularly evaluated
 - ensuring that the new interim executive board has a good grasp of data about students' performance and the quality of teaching, and holds leaders to account for the school's performance.

- Raise achievement, including the achievement of sixth formers, by:
 - sharing good quality and accurate information regularly with subject leaders and staff so that they understand how well all students and groups of students are doing
 - ensuring that lesson planning is based on what this information reveals about what students already know, and what they need to do to improve.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 May 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive headteacher, senior leaders, groups of students, the Chair and other members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The executive headteacher was appointed following the section 5 inspection to lead the school for one year in the first instance. Her interim headship has been extended until December 2014. The Interim Executive Board (IEB) has launched a process of consultation on the school's conversion to academy status and has named its preferred sponsor as EMLC (East Midlands Learning Community). The school is waiting for formal approval from the Department for Education for this proposed change in status. A building programme for an extension to the school's facilities is ongoing, with completion anticipated in early 2015.

There has been extensive re-structuring of roles and responsibilities across the staff. At Easter, eight members of staff left the school; a further five teachers will leave in the course of the summer term. A senior leader with responsibility for science will join the school in June and new appointments have been made to lead modern foreign languages, art, and the sixth form. The leadership team has been reduced in size; two senior leaders will leave the school at the end of the academic year.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There are now much better systems in place to track the progress of all groups of students. Teachers plan their lessons using this information. They have a more detailed and precise understanding of the different starting points and needs of students in their lessons. As a result, they plan activities and groupings more effectively and know when to intervene with support where students are not meeting their targets. Senior leaders challenge teachers routinely about the progress of different groups and individuals; teachers work from the principle that all students should be expected to make good or better progress. Expectations are higher as a result of this shared understanding.

Predictions based on more accurate and wide-ranging assessment information suggest a rise in GCSE results in 2014, as a result of better progress, including in English, mathematics and science. The progress of boys in English is improving on last year, when it was unacceptably low. The achievement of students of Pakistani heritage is also improving. However, there is not yet a strong enough rise in the achievement of students eligible for free school meals.

Sixth form achievement is improving on last year and there is less variation in standards between different subjects. In some sixth form lessons, students make good progress because teachers plan challenging lessons and encourage students to stretch themselves. There are still instances, however, where teachers do not demand enough. The offer of courses has been streamlined, with a focus on those with better success rates. Students appreciate the better quality information and advice they receive about how well they are doing and which course to study. A clear action plan is in place for continuing improvement and the handover from the existing to the new sixth form leader is being well managed.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving; there is no longer evidence of inadequate practice. Teachers expect and demand more from students generally. However, in some students' books, the work is unfinished, untidy, or not well developed. This contrasts markedly with books that show continual improvement, high levels of productivity, and careful presentation. Teachers and subject leaders are not examining these inconsistencies for patterns that might explain underachievement, for example routinely comparing the work of boys in English with that of girls.

Marking is improving, but is still not consistently good. The school's agreed approach to marking, which encourages students to respond to what the teacher has said, is having a positive impact on progress where teachers are conscientious in its use, but it falls down when marking is not done, or is scant. There are extensive opportunities for students to evaluate their own and one another's work, but too often they do not have the skills, language, or confidence to do this effectively. There is evidence of excellent marking, including of sixth form work, which has led to deeper understanding and faster progress because it offers specific guidance for improvement. These high quality examples are a strong foundation from which to develop consistently good practice across and within all subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The executive headteacher has set higher standards and expectations of behaviour. Around the school and in lessons, behaviour is generally good; students are polite, welcoming, and keen to share and discuss their work. However, some have not fully accepted or understood changes in the school; they do not perceive themselves as having a stake or a role in its positive development.

Attendance is improving overall, but remains low for some groups of students, such as those eligible for free school meals. Senior leaders are well focused on driving up attendance. One important impact of their work has been to reduce the figure for persistent absenteeism by half. Exclusions are too high, partly as a result of the executive headteacher's 'zero tolerance' of poor behaviour. Senior leaders expect exclusions to reduce as higher expectations become established; this will be a focus of the next inspection visit.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The first monitoring inspection found the executive headteacher to be establishing a culture of optimism and collegiality, and setting expectations for change. This second visit has shown that she has maintained the spirit of shared responsibility and kept morale buoyant, but has also shown steely resolve in confronting inadequacy. Staff who have been unable or unwilling to rise to the challenge have left.

The school's understanding of itself and the quality of planning for its rapid improvement are much stronger. Checks on the quality of teaching are now systematic and well organised. Senior leaders keep extensive records of their lesson observations and checks on books. This is a significant improvement, but its impact is limited because these records do not report sharply enough on learning. They are more focused on what the teacher is doing, rather than on the influence this is having on how well students are achieving. They do not make clear enough if there are differences in the achievement of groups of students within and across subjects. Subject leadership is not yet strong enough, but is benefitting from the support of external consultants. Subject leaders vary in their understanding of how to improve teaching and learning and of what good or outstanding practice looks like.

The IEB is an effective force for good. Along with the executive headteacher, it has implemented a huge amount of systemic and structural change in a short space of time. Its members bring invaluable expertise to the school: educational, financial and business. They monitor, challenge and support the quality of teaching and learning and have a shrewd and accurate understanding of how well different groups of students are doing. They guide and manage the building programme and have set an achievable plan for budget stability in very difficult financial circumstances. They have managed the preparations for transition to academy status smoothly.

External support

The executive headteacher has made extensive use of consultancy to support and drive improvements in teaching and learning, and to show middle leaders how best to raise achievement. This external support has been carefully commissioned and managed, so that it has not overwhelmed or overshadowed internal improvements. Some of the work alongside the heads of English, mathematics and science, to deliver better examination results, has been particularly successful. Where there have been more general reviews of teaching, or of a particular subject, they have not always focused sharply enough on learning, or on the achievement of different groups, mirroring rather than counteracting this omission in the school's own work.