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26 June 2014

Mrs Helen McEvoy
Headteacher
Graham School Science College
Woodlands Drive
Scarborough
North Yorkshire
YO12 6QW

Dear Mrs McEvoy

Special measures monitoring inspection of Graham School Science College

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 June 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 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 December 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint up to four 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 and the Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables students to reach higher standards and achieve well, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan and set work that matches the needs and abilities of students
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve
 - challenge the most able students more effectively so that they make better progress
 - focus on helping students to practise, develop and improve their literacy and presentation skills
 - plan interesting lessons that motivate students to learn well and to improve their behaviour
 - mark students' work regularly and provide specific advice on how they can make improvements
 - require their students to act upon the advice given in marking
 - question skilfully in lessons to check how well students understand their work and to push their learning on further
 - manage more effectively the learning of students with special educational needs and those eligible for support through the pupil premium so they can all make at least good progress.

- Improve students' behaviour and safety, by:
 - managing behaviour more consistently to improve students' attitudes to learning and to reduce the number of exclusions
 - ensuring that all groups of students attend school regularly so they do not miss learning time
 - improving students' attendance at school; in particular, the attendance of pupils with special educational needs and those eligible for support through the pupil premium.

- Ensure that senior leaders and governors drive improvement effectively, by:
 - focusing relentlessly on developing the quality of teaching and learning and improving the standard of students' behaviour
 - eradicating teaching that presently requires improvement or is inadequate
 - ensuring that all subject leaders monitor the quality of teaching accurately and link it securely to students' progress
 - making sure that all subject leaders provide accurate assessment information to senior leaders so that underachieving students can be identified swiftly and appropriate action taken to improve their learning
 - using performance management to hold all staff to account for their responsibilities in order to drive up achievement and improve students' behaviour
 - taking swift action should the work of senior leaders, subject leaders and year group leaders fail to bring about rapid improvements in students' achievement and behaviour
 - ensuring that pupil premium funding is used effectively to overcome barriers to developing higher standards and better behaviour
 - ensuring that the school's information on attendance and exclusions can be compared to national statistics very readily so that weaknesses can be identified and greater challenge and focus can be given to particular groups of students
 - ensuring that governors hold the headteacher to account much more effectively for the quality of teaching, students' achievement and their behaviour.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24 to 25 June 2014.

Evidence

The inspector made 13 short visits to lessons taught by 13 different teachers accompanied by different members of the senior leadership team, examined students' books and assessed their behaviour in and out of lessons. Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leadership team, middle leaders and the special educational needs coordinator, teachers and support staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, students from Year 8 to Year 10, a group of parents and two local authority advisers. A range of documentation was scrutinised including students' achievement and tracking data, attendance and exclusion data, pupil premium (additional government funding) information and the school's improvement plans, monitoring and evaluation records. The local authority's statement of action was also evaluated.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in March 2014, several members of staff have left the school and staff absence rates have been high. Consequently, the need to use supply teachers has been high. One governor has left the governing body and several members of the teaching staff are due to leave the school at the end of the current academic year.

The new deputy headteacher joined the school at the start of the summer term. A recent recruitment drive has resulted in a number of new teachers being appointed to join the school in September 2014. Recruitment for an additional assistant headteacher and for a number of teaching vacancies is ongoing.

A potential financial deficit has been forecast and a formal consultation process for a revised staffing structure to avoid this possibility has commenced.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The newly appointed deputy headteacher has worked swiftly and determinedly with colleagues to improve the quality of the school's assessment and tracking data. Heads of department and class teachers are now being held to account for students' performance through regular review meetings and routine scrutiny of students' work. The reliable and robust information that is now being produced indicates that more students throughout the school are making better progress in lessons than was previously the case. As a result, school leaders are confident that standards are beginning to rise and their projections for students' achievements are closer to the mark for the 2013/14 academic year than they have been in recent years.

The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs grade A* to C, including English and mathematics, looks set to improve this year. A comprehensive analysis of the use and impact of the pupil premium and students' progress data has been undertaken. This shows that gaps in the performance of those students supported by the pupil premium funding and their peers are beginning to narrow, albeit slowly.

Within this more positive picture of rising standards and improvements in students' achievements, the performance of students who are disabled or have special educational needs remains a concern; as does the variation in performance between boys and girls and individual subjects. Now that senior leaders have more reliable information, they are investigating the reasons behind these variations with vigour so that effective strategies can be put in place to tackle them. Nonetheless, key areas for investigation at the next monitoring inspection will be the impact of:

- new initiatives to provide intensive support to tackle underachievement for different groups of students and to accelerate progress and narrow performance gaps across the school and in different subjects
- the support provided for students who are disabled or have special educational needs.

The quality of teaching

Effective strategies are improving teaching and learning. Consequently, almost all staff are raising their expectations of what students can achieve and teaching is showing more strengths and fewer weaknesses. The inspector's own observations during short visits to lessons noted strengths and weaknesses in teaching that were closely matched to those identified by senior and middle leaders' own observations.

Middle leaders and teachers are placing an increased emphasis on assessing students' achievement based on the levels of progress that individual students are making. Recently completed surveys of students' views indicate that more teaching is engaging them in their learning and they are increasingly provided with activities which challenge them appropriately. The inspector noted an increased pace in teaching and learning and more attention given to meeting the needs of different groups of students in the class. Scrutiny of school documents and discussions with teaching staff confirm that assessment and tracking data are being used more effectively across the school. As a result, students' prior attainment and individual starting points are increasingly being taken into account when planning activities.

The quality of marking and feedback is improving. However, there is still some variation in the quality of feedback teachers provide, and the extent to which students follow up and improve their work as a result. This is largely because more time is needed for recent initiatives to become consistently embedded practice throughout the school. Senior leaders are currently finalising policies and procedures to establish clear whole-school expectations for students' homework ready for implementation at the start of the 2014/15 academic year.

Teaching staff and teaching assistants are accessing a good range of professional development activities through the local authority advisers and sharing and developing best practice with each other and colleagues at other schools, such as Nunthorpe and Stokesley. These activities are generally welcomed and are having a positive impact, which is apparent in the improvements being seen in the impact of teaching and learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In lessons and around the school students are generally polite and well mannered to adults and one another. Most students arrive at lessons promptly, are ready to learn and are increasingly demonstrating more positive attitudes to learning. Students report that behaviour in most lessons has improved since the introduction of the 'Behaviour Pathway' earlier this year but there are inconsistencies in how staff, especially supply staff, use the yellow and red cards and distribute rewards. Senior leaders are tackling inconsistency by: holding staff to account through regular performance management meetings; recruiting new teaching staff to minimise the use of supply staff and developing a programme of training and induction for the start of the new academic year that includes the effective management of behaviour. The behaviour policy and the system of sanctions and rewards for positive attitudes and behaviour are currently being reviewed by the Student Behaviour and Safety Committee. Students are involved in the review process and parents' views are being sought through a parent focus group due to take place in July 2014.

Attendance for the year to date has improved by almost two percentage points when compared to that in the 2012/13 academic year. Persistent absence is reducing in response to recently introduced strategies and the determined efforts of the persistent absence mentor and other key support staff. Exclusion rates are declining in response to more effective school strategies, such as the 'Turnaround Centre', which is providing increasingly effective support for students at risk of exclusion. The number of students excluded on more than one occasion is reducing significantly as a result. Parents are being included in managing poor attendance and behaviour at an earlier stage. However, the school's ability to deal with the most persistent cases of absence robustly is hampered because the local authority's Education Welfare Service is proving ineffective in pursuing cases in a timely manner.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since her appointment in January 2014, the headteacher has confronted head on a significant number of long-established but ineffective practices, including weak performance management of staff. The leadership and organisation of the school have been overhauled. Senior leaders' drive, ambition and enthusiasm to bring about improvement are palpable. Middle leaders and teaching staff are increasingly sharing their determination, dedication and commitment. Teaching and support staff report a clearer sense of direction and confidence after a period of turbulence and uncertainty. Across the school, higher expectations and aspirations are resulting in an increased commitment to ensuring all students fulfil their potential.

The school now has an honest and accurate understanding of its true position. The right priorities needed to bring about rapid improvement have been identified. Effective actions and strategies have been implemented in recent months. Rigorous systems and procedures are being introduced. Concerted efforts are being made to improve the use of school data and management information throughout the school. Effective systems to track and monitor students' learning and progress are being implemented. Teachers' performance management, coaching and development are rightly being given high priority.

As yet, though, there has been insufficient time for these initiatives to have a significant positive impact on students' achievement. Behaviour, attendance and attitudes to school are, however, showing signs of improvement after the declines of 2013. Students and parents are generally receiving better information about what is happening in the school. Their views are being sought regularly through surveys and focus groups.

Reviews of the curriculum and pastoral support provided for students have been completed. New curriculum and tutorial arrangements are in place from the start of the new academic year in September 2014. The support provided for students with a disability or special educational need is improving. Early indications are that changes to the format of individual learning reviews and support arrangements are proving more effective for students and providing clearer guidance and focus for teachers and teaching assistants.

Governors have not shied away from making tough decisions and have a very firm grasp of the challenges the school is facing. They are addressing these robustly, especially through the Rapid Improvement Group. Governors demonstrate that they take their role extremely seriously and want to take account of the views of others. Governors are providing effective support and challenge for all aspects of the school's work, including budgetary management and performance management. Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. The extensive knowledge and experience that the chair of the Student Welfare Committee brings to the school is making a strong contribution to the safety and well-being of students and the development of the new personal, social and health education curriculum being introduced in September 2014.

Governors and the senior leadership team are acutely aware that the greatest challenge to ensuring rapid and sustained improvement is securing high quality teaching staff to fill the vacancies that remain, thereby eliminating the reliance on supply staff that has been a feature of recent months.

External support

Relationships between the local authority and the school are strong and proving effective. The school has continued to receive extensive high quality support from the education development advisers. There is clear evidence of the positive impact of the support provided. For example, through the increased confidence and expertise evident in middle leaders and lead practitioners gained through reviewing progress and undertaking a series of brief visits to lessons and lesson observations jointly; the expertise being contributed to develop best practice and improve provision in specific departments by education development advisers and through partnerships brokered with other local schools including Nunthorpe and Stokesley. The lead local authority adviser is currently seeking resolution of the issues the school has raised about the effectiveness of the Education Welfare Service.