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6 November 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 with Robert Birtwell and Peter McKay, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 4 and 5 November 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 third 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 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 and the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service 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 third monitoring inspection on 4 to 5 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors made 18 short visits to lessons taught by 18 different teachers. The local authority lead adviser accompanied inspectors on four of these visits. A learning walk through physical education lessons was also undertaken. Inspectors examined students' work in their books and assessed their behaviour in and out of lessons. A range of documentation was scrutinised including: students' achievement and tracking data; pupil premium (additional government funding) information; attendance and exclusion data; and the school's improvement plans, monitoring and evaluation records and safeguarding policies and procedures. Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, teachers and support staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors and students from Year 7 to Year 10.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in June 2014, several members of staff have left the school. Staff absence rates have remained high. An extensive recruitment and restructuring process has been undertaken. Fifteen teachers, including five newly qualified teachers, joined the school in September. Two assistant headteachers have been appointed and will join the school in January 2015. Substantial reductions in costs have been secured and school leaders are no longer forecasting a sizeable deficit beyond September 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The new senior leadership team set about tackling inadequacies in teaching and assessment with rigour and determination. However, there was too little time for their actions to have any significant impact on improving the achievement of students already in their final year at the school. Unvalidated data for the 2013-14 academic year indicate the proportion of students obtaining five or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, at the end of Year 11 remained low. Gaps in the attainment of boys and girls, and in the performance of students supported by the pupil premium funding and their peers narrowed slightly but remained too wide. Students' outcomes varied considerably by subject. Students' achievements were much better in biology, chemistry, art, physics and vocational subjects, such as creative and media, sport and travel and tourism than they were in English, mathematics, humanities, languages and design and technology.

The quality of the school's assessment and tracking data has improved considerably and this indicates that students' achievements and the progress they are making are improving throughout the school. Improvement is currently strongest in Key Stage 3. Here, the school's focus on helping students to practise, develop and improve their literacy and presentation skills is having a positive impact. There are clear signs that more effective teaching and the range of strategies being employed are beginning to narrow performance gaps between boys and girls, and between students who are supported by the pupil premium funding and their peers. School leaders know that there is more to do; especially to tackle the underachievement of students who are disabled or have special educational needs and to reduce the variations in performance seen in different subjects.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve as a result of the actions taken by school leaders and staff. Teaching staff and teaching assistants are accessing a good range of continuous professional development activities through the school's partnerships with King James', Nunthorpe and Stokesley and the local authority. These activities are generally welcomed and are having a positive impact which is apparent in the improvements being seen in the impact of teaching on learning.

School data clearly indicate that more students are making good or better progress in more lessons. Inspection evidence confirms this and indicates that this is beginning to increase the achievement and progress students are making over time.

Inspectors' own observations and learning walk through lessons noted strengths and weaknesses in teaching that were closely matched to those identified by senior leaders' own observations. Staff expectations of what students can achieve continue to rise. Teachers' planning has improved markedly throughout the school. Assessment data are being used more effectively by teachers to plan and set work that is better matched to the needs and abilities of students. Consequently, more students, especially the most able, are now being challenged to make better progress.

The quality of marking and feedback has also continued to improve. There is a more consistent approach throughout the school. Staff generally use praise well to engage and motivate students and are giving clearer advice and guidance about what they need to do to improve their work. Students report that they are given more time to respond to teachers' comments during 'green pen' time. As a result, students say that they feel more motivated and involved in their learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The improvements in attendance and behaviour seen at the last monitoring inspection have been sustained and built upon. Overall attendance continues to rise and is now closer to the national average for secondary schools. Persistent absence and exclusion rates have reduced further.

Students report that they feel safe in and around school and teachers are applying the 'Behaviour Pathway' more consistently than at the time of the last monitoring inspection. While this has led to some further improvements in behaviour around the school, improvements are most noticeable in the classroom because there are fewer disruptions to students' learning as a result of poor behaviour. Nonetheless, despite this strongly improving picture not all students are fully and actively engaged learners or willing participants. A few students, especially some girls, are proving particularly difficult to engage and they display poor attitudes to learning. Changes being made to the behaviour management system this term are intended to place an increased focus on celebrating success, promoting and rewarding positive attitudes to learning and the students' contribution to lessons and school life.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and governors have moved swiftly and resolutely to tackle the significant staffing issues and recruitment difficulties that have posed the greatest barrier to school improvement to date. Fifteen new teachers joined the school in September, eliminating the previous reliance on supply staff. The recent restructure has ensured additional leadership capacity; although this will not come into effect fully until January 2015 when the two recently appointed additional assistant headteachers will join the school.

These changes, though positive will not immediately bring about stability or rapid improvement. They have, however, drawn to a close the period of turbulence and uncertainty that staff and students alike have faced and established the circumstances needed to drive up standards in teaching and learning and bring about sustained improvement over the longer term. In the short term, leaders are acutely aware that with almost one fifth of the teaching staff new to the school, there is much work to be done to support and integrate them and to embed consistent practice and utilisation of the school's systems and procedures.

The headteacher has taken the right decisions and acted swiftly, courageously and with vigour. The determination and dedication she and the senior leaders have shown, have driven the improvements seen during this monitoring inspection. A range of effective systems, procedures and policies are now in place. More consistent whole-school approaches have been established. The curriculum has been revised. Assessment and tracking data are robust and comprehensive. Baseline information against which future progress and improvements can be measured is

being gathered. All of these factors have established the conditions necessary for improvements to accelerate further. Safeguarding arrangements are appropriate and meet current requirements.

A clear understanding of the 'next steps' has been shared with staff. Ongoing staff development activities are equipping teachers and middle leaders with the skills needed to monitor and measure students' progress, set their targets more effectively and make accurate predictions against achievement of expected outcomes. Performance management arrangements for staff are in place and being closely linked to students' achievements. Communications with students and parents continue to improve.

Governors have driven forward improvement and faced up to the complex financial and staffing challenges head on. The activities associated with both the staffing restructure and the rapid improvement group have placed considerable demands upon the time of the headteacher and members of the governing body. The completion of the staff restructuring process places the school in a more secure financial position.

External support

Relationships between the local authority and the school remain positive and productive. The school has made good use of the support provided by the local authority education development advisers and the partnerships it has established with other schools, including King James', Nunthorpe and Stokesley. There is clear evidence of the positive impact of the support provided in the improvements seen in the quality of teaching and learning and the increased accuracy of teachers' assessment and predictions.