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27 February 2015

Ms Mary Gould
Head of School
The Matthew Arnold School
Kingston Road, Staines
TW18 1PF

Dear Ms Gould

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Matthew Arnold School

Following my visit with Julie Miriam and Raminder Arora, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 25 and 26 February 2015, 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 2014. 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 academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

I recommend that the academy only seeks to appoint newly qualified teachers following consultation with Her Majesty's Inspector.

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 Academy Board and the Director of Children's Services for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise their expectations of what students can achieve, plan tasks that are sufficiently demanding and challenge students to give of their best when their work does not meet the required standard
 - make better use of information about students' prior learning and attainment when planning especially for those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, so that work is matched more closely to meet their learning needs.
- Urgently improve the achievement of all students by:
 - improving standards of work in English, mathematics and science
 - increasing the percentage of students achieving the highest GCSE grades
 - improving the quality of students' writing in all their subjects so that they are not held back by their weak written communication skills
 - ensuring that teachers' accurately mark students' work, especially in English, to provide clear guidance to students' on how to improve their learning, is used to set challenging targets and to identify students who are falling behind
 - sharing the methods that more successful departments are using to raise standards.
- Improve students' behaviour and safety by:
 - improving making sure all students meet an acceptable standard of behaviour in lessons so that time is not lost
 - ensuring students take pride in what they do and challenging them to do better when their work is scruffy or when they are disrespectful
 - rigorously checking on student absence, particularly those eligible for additional funding
 - ensuring the record of bullying incidents is clearly organised and rigorously monitored so all bullying incidents are properly followed up.
- Improve leadership and governance by:
 - ensuring the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding are robust and put into practice well
 - making sure that when leaders evaluate the quality of teaching there is greater emphasis on the impact of teaching on students' achievement
 - leaders giving governors the information they need and governors using the information rigorously to hold leaders to account.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 February 2015

Evidence

Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, other senior staff and middle leaders, the Chair of the Interim Academy Board (IAB), a representative of the local authority and groups of students. Inspectors observed 21 lessons, 13 were jointly observed with school leaders. A range of documents was analysed, including academy improvement plans and records of monitoring activities.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, three teachers have left and three teachers joined. The academy joined The Bourne Education Trust (BET) as a sponsored academy on 1 December 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The academy's own data show that the progress of students in Year 11 is accelerating, reflecting the extra support that they have been provided with. The progress of younger students is difficult to judge due to the lack of secure information about their starting points and current attainment. The academy has understandably put much emphasis on improving key subjects such as English and mathematics, especially for Year 11, but recognises that progress in science and across other year groups needs to improve significantly. Students in all year groups are aware of their target grades, although for some students these are not challenging enough. Specialist teachers from local support schools are providing extension lessons for the most able students in Year 11, although it is too soon to judge how successful this has been in helping students to achieve the highest grades at GCSE.

In many subjects, including English and mathematics, students are making better progress in lessons and over time which is reflected in their books. In some subjects regular marking and feedback provide advice for students to improve their work which is helping them to develop their skills. However, this is not consistent across all subjects. The quality of written work in science is not as good as in other subjects.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved in many subjects. Teachers' expectations of students are rising and clear routines are being established in lessons. Teachers plan sequences of lessons more effectively to keep students interested and students told inspectors how much more they enjoy their learning. Learning is most effective when teachers make sure they explain how the work links to students' target grades and check how well the students are learning during lessons. However, in many cases, teachers do

not build on students' prior learning. As a result, students who find the work too difficult or too easy lose concentration and do not progress well.

Systems are now in place to help teachers identify students who are at risk of underachieving. Some teachers use this information to help disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs learn more effectively, but this practice varies across subjects.

Subject leaders and other leaders in the academy check the quality of marking regularly and marking is improving in most subjects. Students are clearer about what their targets are and many books record these. However, teachers miss too many opportunities to refer back to these targets when marking, which limit students' progress. Although there were examples of effective marking in some subjects, such as modern languages, the way teachers mark books varies across subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The conduct of students in lessons has improved. Most students arrive in lessons ready to learn and show respect towards the teachers and each other. When teaching is less effective a minority of students drift off task, but there is little disruption to learning. Relations between students and staff are positive. Around the site, the large majority of students behave well. There is a high level of supervision to help maintain good order. A few instances of inappropriate behaviour were observed.

Attendance has declined slightly and is well below the academy's target. Leaders have introduced improved systems for monitoring absence and implemented a range of actions designed to improve attendance, but these have not yet had the desired impact. Most, but not all, students are punctual to lessons.

All statutory aspects of safeguarding are now in place. Students say they feel safe in the academy. They told inspectors that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively by staff. However, the academy's bullying log does not accurately record the level of bullying incidents, nor how they are resolved.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The head of school is working well with her senior team, which is showing determination to accelerate the pace of improvement. She maintains high expectations of students and staff, communicates a clear vision and has improved staff morale. The executive head and other leaders from the trust provide strong guidance and challenge for senior and middle leaders which have improved their effectiveness. The executive head has focused on recruiting specialist teachers and leaders and, where gaps remain, there are plans to deploy staff with greater expertise from other schools within the trust to the academy. There are comprehensive training programmes for staff, particularly for relatively inexperienced

teachers. However, steps taken to address weaknesses in teaching are not always checked to see if they have been successful.

Academy leaders know there is still much to be done to ensure that all students progress well. There is a range of plans, which set out actions designed to bring about improvement. The actions are not always linked to measurable success criteria which can be used to evaluate the impact of the actions taken. Agreed amendments to add progress measures to the academy development plan have yet to be made. Identifying which leaders are responsible for carrying out actions and who is responsible for checking that the changes have taken place and how these actions will be evaluated will allow better accountability.

Leaders routinely make judgements about the quality of teaching based on the activities taking place during lessons, rather than the impact of these activities on students' learning and progress. Nevertheless, during the inspection, leaders accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching across the academy. This insight needs to be used to sharpen systems to evaluate the quality of teaching and ensure consistent use of these expectations by senior and middle leaders. Middle leaders are keen to learn and to share their expertise with each other. The subject leader for History has usefully modelled some good practice for other subject leaders to follow. This training is improving their leadership skills and their commitment is contributing significantly to the improvements taking place in the academy.

The IAB is maintaining a close oversight of the academy's work. The Chair of the IAB knows the academy well. Members of the IAB visit the school regularly and use external reports to verify their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. This information is being used to hold academy leaders rigorously to account.

External support

The academy has been supported extensively and effectively by its sponsor, BET. Senior and middle leaders and teachers from other schools in the trust are deployed to the academy to build capacity. Specialist lead teachers provide training for teachers as well as working directly with students in Year 11. The trust has also provided expertise to help with the management of the budget, which is no longer overspent.

The local authority has supported the school by checking leaders' judgements through regular reviews.