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6 March 2015

Mrs Lisa Lyon
Mount Gilbert School
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Telford
TF4 3PP

Dear Mrs Lyon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Mount Gilbert School

Following my visit to your school on 4–5 March 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 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 March 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection without first discussing this with me.

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 Director of Children's Services for Telford and Wrekin.

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that students make the progress of which they are capable, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - assess students' ongoing progress and learning so that they know how well the students are doing
 - provide work that builds well on what students already know, is not too easy or too hard for them and which they find interesting
 - mark students' work and provide written and verbal feedback to students about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work.

- Improve students' skills in English and mathematics by making sure that:
 - there are high expectations of what students can achieve, particularly in the progress they can make
 - subject and school leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and marking to bring about improvements in teachers' practice.

- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes by:
 - providing a better range of subjects and activities that meet students' needs and interests more effectively so that they attend more often and take better care over their work
 - ensuring that all staff have the skills to support students in their behaviour and are consistent in managing incidents of inappropriate behaviour
 - establishing clear consequences for behaviour that are effective in modifying poor behaviour and reducing fixed-term exclusions
 - strengthening the rewards system further, and its use by staff, so that students are more aware of the advantages of good behaviour
 - ensuring that the new systems for addressing poor attendance have a positive impact on getting students into school and reducing absence.

- Improve leadership and management and governance so that they are effective in bringing about improvements at a rapid pace by ensuring that:
 - checks on the quality of teaching and progress are far more rigorous so that areas for development are identified and tackled quickly
 - the school's plan for improvement identifies the right priorities and sets clear, measurable targets and timelines for improvement
 - procedures for tracking the progress of students are comprehensive and are used to hold staff to account for students' progress where it is not good enough
 - subject leaders have a clear understanding of the progress of students

- and the strengths and areas for improvement in their subjects
 - governors set school leaders clear targets for improvement and are rigorous in checking that these have been achieved
 - checks on the spending of pupil premium funding from the government, and the Year 7 'catch up' funding, are rigorous and that the way funds are used has a positive impact on students' learning.
- Establish more rigorous systems for checking how well students are achieving and how safe they are when they attend off-site courses.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 March 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, and with four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. She also met with two representatives of the local authority and a Local Leader of Education who is providing support for school leaders. Responses to the school's recent surveys of staff and students' views were considered and the inspector spoke with three parents. A meeting took place with a small group of students and informal discussions were held with other students at lunchtimes and break times. The inspector made visits to lessons and looked at the work in students' books. She also met with two police officers to discuss the ways that they are working with the school. In addition, the inspector looked at a range of documents including minutes of meetings of the governing body, records kept by leaders following their checks on the work of teachers and information about students' achievement.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in November 2014, a new teacher has been appointed to lead the teaching of mathematics. A new student support manager has also joined the school. The inclusion co-ordinator, an information and communication technology technician, and two teaching assistants have left the school. The previous Chair of the Governing Body has resigned and a new Chair has been appointed.

Achievement of students at the school

Despite some recent improvement, poor attendance continues to have a significant impact on students' achievement. On average, students miss more than a day of school each week. This means that many have considerable gaps in their learning and this in turn makes it more difficult for them to make good progress.

Leaders and some teachers have increased their expectations of what students can achieve. These teachers are now setting more challenging work for students and are helping them understand what they need to do in order to gain good marks in examinations. The work in students' books and the school's information about students' achievement show that students are rising to this challenge and more are now making at least expected progress. However, rates of progress in different subjects and classes vary because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Some students continue to struggle with basic reading and writing skills. Leaders recognise that teachers have not all been trained to support students who have particular difficulties in these important areas of learning. Leaders recognise that further training is required so that all staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to help these students make more rapid progress.

During the inspection there were several examples of students making good progress within lessons. In these lessons, students were interested and keen to participate in the activities planned for them and adults asked questions which made students think carefully and justify their answers. This was particularly evident in an English lesson taught by the deputy headteacher and in science, food technology and physical education lessons.

A review of the work in students' books showed that students are generally taking more care over their work. Some students were happy to talk about their work and are increasingly proud of their achievements.

The quality of teaching

There are now more examples of effective teaching, which leads to students making good progress. The most successful teaching builds on a thorough and precise understanding of different students' starting points and ability and provides a good level of challenge. Teachers adapt tasks carefully to meet the learning needs of different students. In GCSE lessons for older students, teachers in English, science, physical education and food technology remind students of how well they are doing in relation to the course or examination requirements, and help them to identify what they need to work on next. This helps students to see the purpose of what they are doing and encourages them to persevere.

Teachers' marking is now more focused on students' learning and progress. There are more examples of precise feedback which helps students understand what they have done well and what they must improve. In some books, teachers use checklists to help students assess their own progress and this is helping them to be clear about their next steps. Although it continues to improve, there is still some variability in the quality of marking and its impact on learning.

In some classes, teachers' assessment of students' learning in previous lessons is not precise enough to enable them to plan work which builds on what students already know, understand and can do. In addition, weaknesses in teachers' understanding of the subject they are teaching sometimes mean that they do not select the right tasks to help students make good progress. For example, the work in books shows that in some English lessons the teacher encourages students to explore a range of interesting topics but does not focus on improving their basic reading and writing skills.

Sometimes teachers provide too much help for students and occasionally complete and record their work for them. These low expectations do not help students to learn and mean that they become increasingly reluctant to complete tasks on their own.

Teachers are not effective in following up and closing the considerable gaps in learning and uncompleted work that arise as a result of students' absence, exclusion or attendance at alternative provision. Consequently, students have not always covered the necessary work in the right sequence to help them to make good progress.

Behaviour and safety of students

The new system for managing students' behaviour, introduced in January, is having a clear and positive impact. The consequences of poor behaviour and the rewards available for good behaviour are clearly displayed around the school and are well understood by students. Staff are now insistent that students attend in uniform and do not smoke on the school premises or leave the site without permission. Students and staff agree that this more determined approach is starting to lead to improvements in behaviour. During the inspection no students were observed smoking, there were no incidents of aggressive behaviour and no students left the school site without permission. This represents a considerable improvement since November when the inspector last visited the school.

Analysis of school records and feedback from staff confirm that there are now fewer occasions when students are aggressive towards staff or one another. Abusive language directed towards staff is now unusual although some students continue to swear frequently. Staff have a consistent approach to this and calmly remind students that there should be no swearing.

There has also been a reduction in the number of incidents where staff have to physically intervene to keep students safe. The number of occasions when students abscond from school has reduced and the number of exclusions had started to fall although it is still well above the average nationally. Observations made during the inspection also confirm that the majority of students now stay in lessons.

Improved systems and strategies are resulting in considerable improvements in behaviour. However, there are still some inconsistencies in the ways that staff communicate with students and respond to poor behaviour. For example, a small number of staff are over-familiar or casual in the way they speak to students and this means that some respond in an inappropriate and sometimes disrespectful way. Some staff ignore students' inattention or poor attitudes to their classwork in order to avoid confrontation. As a result, there are noticeable differences in the way that the same students behave in different lessons.

During the inspection, a group of boys from different year groups enjoyed playing football together at lunchtime. Some older students were heard encouraging younger boys and most set a good example of fair play and co-operation. At the end of lunchtime, students came into school when they were asked to and almost all were quickly settled in their afternoon lessons.

There has been a slight recent improvement in students' attendance and a reduction in the number of students who are persistently absent. Good attendance is promoted and celebrated. For example, on the Friday before the inspection 13 students were congratulated on 100% attendance for the week. However, absence rates are still much higher than the average nationally.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

It was evident from my discussions with the headteacher and other leaders and with the new Chair of the Governing Body and other governors that there is a renewed sense of urgency and determination that Mount Gilbert improves quickly. Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the schools' current position. They have rightly reduced the number of priorities on their plans for improvement so that they focus on the most important issues.

Leaders have raised their expectations for students' behaviour. The new behaviour system has been carefully considered and developed with staff consultation and involvement. Staff and students recognise improvements since new policy was introduced in January. The recording of behaviour incidents, exclusions, physical interventions and attendance is detailed and thorough. Leaders regularly analyse this information and this is helping to identify patterns and trends so that these can be addressed.

School leaders and governors recognise that students' attendance must improve in order for them to make good progress. They are rightly targeting resources, including the work of the very recently appointed student support manager, on reducing persistent absence. The impact of student absence is further compounded for some students because they miss some GCSE lessons when they attend alternative provision. Leaders recognise that they need to review the timetable to ensure that this does not happen.

Leaders collect information about each student's progress and attainment in each subject every half term. Leaders are now working on developing ways of organising and presenting this data to enable them to evaluate how well students make progress from their starting points and how this compares with national expectations. They should also use the information they have gathered to evaluate the progress of students on different learning pathways. Leaders are rightly focusing

on students' progress from their outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2. However, many students join the school part way through Key Stage 3 or 4 and have often experienced disruptions to their education. Consequently, leaders should ensure that students' starting points when they join the school are assessed, checked and recorded so that progress during their time at Mount Gilbert can be accurately evaluated.

Leaders, including subject leaders, make regular checks on the quality of teaching by visiting lessons, looking at work in students' books and considering information about their achievement. As a result, leaders have a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and of variations between teachers. For example, the English subject leader is able to talk confidently and knowledgeably about aspects of teaching which are effective, those which are improving and those which need to be improved. She recognises the need for some teachers to develop their expertise in supporting students with enduring literacy difficulties.

When leaders identify weaknesses in teaching, they clearly record and share with teachers the aspects of their work that must be improved. They sometimes set out how the teacher will be supported and when further checks will be made, but this is not yet consistent and so the pace of improvement is not as rapid as it could be.

The headteacher knows how much pupil premium funding is allocated to the school and can say how this is spent. Governors have rightly requested further information about the impact of this funding on the achievement and well-being of disadvantaged students. Consequently, the headteacher is evaluating the success of different interventions and areas of spending. She is also starting to work with other staff to identify the most significant barriers to achievement for disadvantaged students and ensure that the funding is being used in the most effective way to enable students to overcome these barriers.

Leaders have made improvements to the systems for checking how well students are achieving and how safe they are when they attend alternative provision. A school leader makes regular visits to each provider and ensures that the appropriate checks have been made on all adults and that safeguarding requirements are met. Information about students' attendance is communicated to the school office at the start of each day and any absence is followed up promptly. Leaders collect and review information about students' progress regularly.

Governors now meet more frequently and minutes of their meetings show that they are more focused on improving outcomes for students. Governors have a good range of skills and expertise and they are developing these further by attending training. They also make regular visits to the school. This is helping them to develop a thorough and accurate understanding of the impact of the changes which have been made and of the considerable improvements still required. Governors are providing greater challenge to school leaders and are holding them to account for

their work by asking questions and requesting information. The headteacher and senior leaders welcome this increased challenge and support.

External support

Local authority representatives have an accurate overview of the school's current position. The Local Leader of Education (LLE) commissioned by the local authority is a regular visitor to the school and provides good levels of support and challenge to school leaders. She is currently helping leaders to improve the way that they organise and present information about students' progress so that it can be compared with national data. The local authority has been successful in helping the school to recruit a new Chair of the Governing Body who has good levels of skills and expertise.

The local authority has not acted with sufficient urgency to assist school leaders in addressing students' very poor attendance and the high number of exclusions. It has taken too long to commission and organise the support requested by the headteacher to help improve behaviour and attendance. However, the local authority has recently organised a review, which was carried out by a member of the behaviour support team and an educational psychologist. The review identified a number of recommendations and next steps which have been shared with the school. Arrangements for further support are yet to be confirmed.