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26 March 2015

Mrs M Richardson
Headteacher
Penn School
Church Road
Penn
High Wycombe
HP10 8LZ

Dear Mrs Richardson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Penn School

Following my visit with Catherine Leahy, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 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 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 Chair of the Trustees, the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector
Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it enables all students to make at least good progress, ensuring that:
 - lessons are planned to build on the prior learning of students
 - the intended learning outcomes of all lessons are clear and precise for individuals and groups
 - activities are purposeful and relevant
 - support from adults is always effective in improving learning and promoting students' independence
 - students are encouraged to be more active in lessons and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Improve students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that the assessment of students' current learning is accurate
 - setting challenging targets for students' progress based on their starting points and, where appropriate, according to national expectations
 - regularly monitoring progress to identify any underachievement and intervening when necessary.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - reviewing and clarifying roles, including establishing clear accountabilities for students' progress and for the quality of teaching and the residential provision
 - ensuring leaders, including governors, have the necessary skills in order to carry out their roles, and offering training where necessary
 - sharpening monitoring and evaluation procedures so that leaders, including governors, have a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
 - developing school improvement plans that have measurable outcomes and clear timescales, and carrying out actions agreed.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- Meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, six members of the governing body, senior leaders, the school nurse, the bursar and students. They held telephone discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Trustees.

The residential provision did not form part of this inspection.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, two support assistants have left the school and three new members have joined the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students are making better progress since the last monitoring inspection. This positive picture is supported by the school's own data, lesson observations and the scrutiny of students' work. Achievement is particularly high in physical education, art and English. Standards in reading and writing are rising quickly following the introduction of a new reading programme and a writing policy. They are rising in mathematics because teachers are planning tasks which are matched more closely to students' needs and the most able students are following higher-level GCSE courses. In some other subjects, the courses offered do not always provide sufficient challenge for more-able students. Senior leaders recognise that this is partly due to a lack of resources, for example in design and technology and in science.

Senior leaders now have more accurate information on students' levels of attainment and are using it more effectively to record progress and to set challenging learning targets for students. They are analysing information more thoroughly to spot students who are falling behind and to check the performance of different groups. For example, they are now able to report that girls in some year groups do not perform as well as boys.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving although there is inconsistency between subjects. Teachers are generally planning lessons which have clearer learning targets and which build more effectively on students' prior learning. Teachers are following agreed policies, for example in writing, in classes across the school, which is demonstrated in the higher quality of students' work in books and folders. The marking of students' work is more systematic, although in a few lessons suggestions for improvement are not always followed up by students. Teachers are planning more interesting lessons which capture students' interest. As a result, students

demonstrate more positive attitudes towards learning and they are working harder. Teachers and learning support assistants use appropriate communication aids to support learning, for example signing and pictorial timetables. While teachers are generally using assessment information more effectively to plan work which is at the right level for students, in some lessons the work is too easy. In part, this is due to the inaccuracy of historic information on students' attainment which has resulted in some students following GCSE entry level courses when they could be working at a higher level. Teachers are keeping more detailed records of students' progress and there are good examples of students being involved in checking their own progress, for example, against National Curriculum levels in information and communication technology.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school provides a calm and orderly environment. Good plans are in place for supporting individual students who display anxious behaviour. Independence and social skills are generally developed well in lessons with students getting out equipment and putting their work away with little prompting. Students say that they enjoy coming to school and attendance is broadly average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher, senior and middle leaders have driven several improvements since the last monitoring inspection, particularly in the use of information on students' progress and in raising standards in reading and writing. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly, which has led to more consistency across the school in the setting of learning targets for students and in the use of marking. Senior leaders are learning quickly the leadership skills needed for taking the school forward and raising standards further. However, they have not yet developed fully their skills in monitoring and evaluating some aspects of the school's work. Consequently, information on the quality of teaching and plans for improving learning lack detail and some judgements reached about the school's performance are too generous. Channels of communication are not always clear, which occasionally leads to issues not being tackled in a timely way and policies and procedures not being updated as required. For example, while the school provides a safe environment for students, leaders have not updated all safeguarding policies to reflect the most recent guidance. Senior leaders are developing plans for using the pupil premium funding which the school has received recently for a small number of students.

The governing body has set up appropriate systems for overseeing the work of the school. Governors are sharing information more effectively through the governor website. They have improved arrangements for managing the performance of staff, and the teaching and learning committee is receiving a good level of information on students' progress. The governing body is not yet able to challenge fully some

aspects of the school's performance because the information it receives lacks detail, for example, regarding the quality of teaching and the absence rate of staff. Governors and Trustees are continuing a consultation process on a longer-term plan for the school and are seeking the views of local authorities to help determine the pattern of future admissions. Uncertainty around the number on roll and the range of needs future students might present limits some aspects of forward planning. Governors and Trustees have a good understanding of the financial challenges facing the school and have set a realistic budget.

External support

Subject leaders are using links with other special schools well to develop their subjects and have good plans for extending this further, for example through sharing resources.