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14 October 2015

Mr Richard Woods
Acting Principal
The Mandeville School
Ellen Road
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Buckinghamshire
HP21 8ES

Dear Mr Woods

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Mandeville School

Following my visit, with Richard Kearsley and Karen Roche, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 22 and 23 September 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, other than in consultation with me.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire. The letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is good or better in all subjects, by making sure that:
 - all teachers have the highest expectations of what students are capable of achieving
 - teachers ensure that work is accurately matched to the skills and abilities of all students throughout the lesson
 - work is regularly and accurately marked, so that students are clear how well they have done and what they need to do to improve
 - all teachers give students regular opportunities to participate in lessons.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - involving all leaders and governors in a thorough review of the school's strengths and weaknesses and using this information to implement a clear plan for improvement that includes challenging, measurable targets and timescales
 - organising the school's programme for checking the quality of teaching so that it is coherent and consistent and brings about rapid improvements in teaching
 - ensuring that leaders of subjects, particularly English, mathematics and science, understand the strengths and weaknesses of their subject area and take effective action to bring about rapid improvement in achievement and teaching
 - ensuring improvement plans are clear, have specific outcomes and include interim measures against which progress can be regularly evaluated
 - ensuring that the new interim executive board has a good grasp of data about students' performance and the quality of teaching and holds leaders to account for the school's performance.
- Raise achievement, including the achievement of sixth formers, by:
 - sharing good quality and accurate information regularly with subject leaders and staff so that they understand how well all students and groups of students are doing
 - ensuring that lesson planning is based on what this information reveals about what students already know, and what they need to do to improve.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 22–23 September 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting Principal, senior and middle leaders, the Director of Education and the Director of Standards and Interventions for the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, groups of students and the chair of the interim executive board (IEB).

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the Principal has resigned and the consultant appointed by the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust has taken over as acting Principal. A permanent vice principal has been appointed, who is also temporarily filling the role of special educational needs coordinator. The Buckinghamshire Learning Trust is funding an additional consultant vice principal for two days a week. The school was fully staffed for the start of September, following the departure of 13 teachers at the end of the summer term. The process of appointing a permanent Principal is underway.

The new building, complete but unoccupied at my last visit, is now fully open and operational, providing a new entrance and reception area as well as specialist teaching accommodation. A new computer system has been installed throughout the school. The school is full and oversubscribed in Year 7; sixth form numbers have risen significantly.

At the time of my last visit, the school had been granted ministerial approval for conversion to academy status. However, the proposed academy sponsor has since withdrawn. The IEB is actively seeking a new sponsor.

Outcomes for pupils

Progress in lessons is better where experienced teachers have taken over, or where existing teachers have worked hard to develop and improve their practice. However, the arrival of a significant number of new and inexperienced teachers presents a new challenge to senior leaders. Despite overall improvements, there are still too many lessons where students are not working as hard as they might, or not making good enough progress, because teachers are not demanding enough of them. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where the head of department has yet to establish consistent and strong teaching across the new team.

Boys continue to underachieve in comparison to girls. Students eligible for pupil premium funding do less well than they should. However, results in 2015 show some improvement, notably in boys' progress in English, where they achieved markedly better GCSE results than in 2014. Boys also made better progress in mathematics and in science, but in mathematics, standards overall were still too low.

Disadvantaged students also made better progress in 2015, although the gap between their attainment and that of other students remains wide. Support for disabled students or those who have special educational needs is better organised and leaders track achievement in this group more rigorously. Their progress is improving, especially in English. Gains for boys were offset by a drop in girls' achievement, showing that improvement is not yet consistent or sustained for all groups. Overall, the school's results remain below the government floor standards for attainment and progress.

Achievement in the sixth form reflects that of the rest of the school. Results in 2015 improved slightly, but girls significantly outperformed boys and disadvantaged students achieved less well than their peers. There were mixed results for those students re-taking GCSE English and mathematics. About half achieved a C grade in English, but only a handful in mathematics.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is better than at the last monitoring visit because students are experiencing fewer temporary and non-specialist teachers. There are strengths; for example, in a GCSE English lesson, students applied themselves diligently to their work. The teacher's planning took careful account of students' skills, building on them to ensure that all students were able to develop and improve their writing. The lesson was illustrative of the department's success in closing gaps between different groups: boys worked with equal dedication and success to girls. The teacher constantly evaluated individual students' needs and intervened judiciously, so that learning moved on briskly. No time was wasted.

Not all teachers apply the principle that 'every minute counts' in a lesson. The level of demand varies too much from subject to subject and lesson to lesson. Senior leaders' programme for improving teaching is beginning to have an impact. However, it is not influencing the practice of the newest and least experienced teachers quickly enough, or eradicating weak teaching where it is creeping back in. Students are grateful for stability, but they have tolerated too much inadequacy for too long and are satisfied with too little. They think teaching is better than it is.

In the sixth form, courses have expanded in line with numbers and in response to student requests. Popular new subjects are now offered, but some are taught by teachers with little or no experience of teaching at this level. Consequently, students' progress has been very uneven so far this year.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Students are friendly, polite and welcoming. Their behaviour around the site is generally orderly and mostly calm. However, students can also be boisterous and inconsiderate of others in busy corridors. Staff are not making a concerted enough effort to instil more purposeful movement around school or effective starts to all

lessons. Behaviour in lessons is better than at the last monitoring visit. Students appreciate that sanctions for misbehaviour are more consistently applied by teachers. However, disruption to learning has not disappeared, and is a particular problem in mathematics and in areas where inexperienced teachers have not yet established high enough expectations.

School leaders take appropriate action to keep students safe and liaise effectively with external agencies when required. They are vigilant about potential risk and understand the dangers to young people of exposure to extreme or radical views. However, this is not reflected strongly enough in the published safeguarding policy, nor is the school's approach to protecting young people from sexual exploitation.

Older students now take a lead role in delivering assemblies that reinforce 'zero tolerance' of bullying. School leaders follow up carefully on any incidents of poor behaviour or bullying, but they do not maintain a sharp or clear enough whole-school analysis of the success of their actions. Attendance is improving but still lags behind the national average.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting Principal has moved quickly to remove obstacles to improvement by strengthening the school's leadership. By re-structuring the middle and senior leadership teams, he has ensured a greater focus on students' progress, particularly for those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs. As a result, the leadership team is now in an appreciably stronger position to drive improvement than at the time of the last monitoring visit.

In addition, the acting Principal has made sure that the school is fully staffed for September. He improved communication with parents, setting up a 'Parents' Forum', which is well attended and growing. He has equipped and opened the new building and secured a grant for the improvement of sixth form facilities.

The consultant vice principal has introduced a systematic, thorough and effective programme for evaluating teaching. This system is complemented by coaching and mentoring for individual teachers. During the monitoring visit, senior leaders, observing learning jointly with inspectors, could demonstrate where teachers are improving their practice and where they still need help. This culture of support, training and development is much stronger than in the past. However, it is not underpinned by equally strong challenge and accountability.

Leaders are still not acting with sufficient urgency, nor are they presenting enough of a united front, to ensure that improvement initiatives, once launched, take hold securely. For example, the good start made by Year 7 students is at risk because some teachers' expectations of what the students can achieve are not high enough. Some teachers harness and channel students' enthusiasm for learning into focused concentration and effort. However, others allow too much chatter, undisciplined

calling out or untidy presentation. Teachers are making a more sustained effort to instil a sense of pride in students, so that their work is better presented and shows maximum effort, but this is not universal. The school marking policy is more widely used by teachers, but some make much better use of it than others to enable students to improve their work or develop their understanding.

The leadership team recognises that these inconsistencies put the school's continued improvement at risk, yet they are not challenging hard enough or fast enough where teachers do not follow agreed protocols for good learning.

External support

The Buckinghamshire Learning Trust has invested significantly in the school since it was judged to require special measures. Its ongoing support for the role of acting Principal has provided much-needed continuity during a period of considerable turbulence. The part-time consultant vice principal, a role also brokered by the trust and arising from the now well-developed partnership with Waddesdon School, has brought significant additional experience and skills to complement those of the acting Principal. His work has been strongly influential in improving teaching.

Buckinghamshire Learning Trust advisers monitor the school closely and report candidly to the IEB. Their latest review highlights remaining weaknesses clearly and correctly pinpoints areas that continue to need urgent attention. Buckinghamshire County Council has supported the school in managing its significant budget deficit and in accessing funding to allow developments while the debt is reduced. A licensed deficit budget has been agreed, with a plan in place to eradicate the deficit over five years.

The Buckinghamshire Learning Trust and the county council have been responsive to the school's urgent needs as they arise. However, they have not, collectively, been successful in establishing substantive and successful leadership, securing the future status of the school or enabling the special measures judgement to be removed before the end of the two-year timeframe. All parties, internal and external, must act with urgency to build on the gains of this visit before the school is next subject to a full Ofsted inspection.

- The IEB, Buckinghamshire Learning Trust and Buckinghamshire County Council should work together urgently to ensure the success of the school, by:
 - appointing a substantive Principal, accountable for immediate and significant improvement such that the school no longer requires special measures
 - securing the status of the school.

- Leaders at all levels should ensure that improvements happen faster and take root, by:
 - uniting behind the Principal to establish the highest standards of behaviour, learning and teaching
 - taking an uncompromising stance on agreed protocols for good learning with all teachers and all students.