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Mrs Meena Gabbi
Principal
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Dear Mrs Gabbi

Special measures monitoring inspection of Montsaye Academy

Following my visit with Emma Nuttall, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 March 2018, 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 that 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 that took place in November 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the school improvement board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016

- Rapidly increase the effectiveness of the leadership and management of teaching by ensuring that:
 - senior and middle leaders quickly and successfully tackle the weaknesses in teaching that they have identified
 - teachers implement, consistently, the school's policies with regard to teaching, learning and assessment and the management of pupils' behaviour
 - teachers are held fully to account for the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - the link between the pay increases awarded to teachers and the achievement of their examination classes is strengthened
 - the training provided for teachers has a clear and demonstrable impact in improving the quality of teaching across the school and, consequently, outcomes for pupils
 - the monitoring of the curriculum is sufficiently strong to ensure that the new arrangements for mixed-ability teaching meet the needs of the most and least able pupils consistently well
 - strategies to improve the quality of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar across the curriculum are embedded quickly and consistently
 - the quality of pupils' presentation of their work improves in the lessons where it is weak.
- Ensure that the funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils is used to raise their achievement rapidly.
- Urgently raise achievement in key stage 4, particularly in mathematics, science and humanities, by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently make effective use of assessment to plan learning which meets the needs of different groups of pupils, including pupils of all abilities
 - ensuring that teachers implement the school's marking and feedback policy consistently so that pupils have a secure understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work
 - tackling weaker aspects of teaching quickly so that pupils receive the consistently good teaching they need to catch up
 - equipping middle leaders with the skills necessary to bring about the improvements needed in their subject departments more quickly.
- Improve outcomes for students in Year 12, particularly boys.

- Strengthen the leadership and management of pupils' behaviour by ensuring that teachers implement the school's behaviour policy consistently and that incidents of low-level disruptive behaviour are eradicated.
- Increase the effectiveness of the governance of the school by ensuring that members of the local governing body and trustees have sufficient oversight of the school's performance and hold leaders to account effectively.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 March 2018

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, a member of support staff and a group of other teaching staff. They also met with members of the school improvement board and the chief executive officer of the trust. Inspectors met with a group of pupils and spoke with others informally around school and in their lessons during the course of the two days. Inspectors visited 21 lessons, many with a senior leader, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and learning observed. They also visited five tutor sessions and observed an assembly. They looked at a sample of pupils' work, across a range of subjects and year groups, and also looked at pupils' work in their lessons. Inspectors considered a variety of documents, including improvement plans, records of monitoring activities, information about pupils' progress and attainment, records relating to attendance and behaviour, and information about safeguarding arrangements. They also read minutes of meetings of the school improvement board and looked at a range of school policies and information published on the school website.

Context

There have been further changes in the school's leadership since the last monitoring visit. One of the vice-principals left the school in December 2017 and a second took up the role of assistant vice-principal in January 2018. A new senior vice-principal joined the school in January 2018. A new head of mathematics also joined the school in January 2018.

A number of teaching staff are due to leave the school at the end of the spring term. Appointments have been made for all posts and the school will remain fully staffed at the start of the summer term.

The school is part of the Montsaye Community Learning Partnership (MCLP). Following the inspection in November 2016, the trust dissolved the governing body and formed a school improvement board (SIB) which remains in place. Governance is provided by the SIB and the MCLP.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has built on the improvements evident at the last monitoring visit. Senior leaders have responded well to her support and challenge. They have developed in confidence and effectiveness as a result. Further capacity has been added to the leadership team by the appointment of the senior vice-principal. He has taken swift and effective action in all areas for which he is responsible.

Leaders have a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher remains clear in her vision for the school. She ensures that all staff understand their role in achieving her aims. There is absolute clarity in roles and responsibilities throughout the school. The headteacher has been consistent in her message that the school's key priority is to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff are now clear about the positive impact that good teaching has on pupils' achievement. Monitoring and evaluation activities focus on how teaching affects pupils' progress. There is now a joined-up approach to school improvement. Middle leaders are supported to understand the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. They are developing their effectiveness in bringing about the necessary improvements.

The school's plans for improvement are detailed and precise. Planned actions focus on clear priorities. Leaders regularly review the impact of their work and amend their strategies accordingly.

To support the implementation of her vision, the headteacher has introduced a new set of values called the Montsaye ERA (excellence, resilience, aspiration). These values are being incorporated into different aspects of the school's work. For example, the values form the framework for reflection activities in morning tutor sessions. Staff nominate pupils who have demonstrated these values and their successes are celebrated by other pupils. Plans are in place to extend the school's work in developing these values to promote pupils' personal development and well-being.

Leaders are now working collaboratively. For example, the raising standards leader (RSL) meets with the teaching, learning and assessment leader to evaluate the impact that developments in teaching are having on pupils' progress. The RSL continues to meet with middle leaders to check pupils' progress and identify actions to bring about further improvements. Since the last monitoring visit, these meetings have been strengthened because actions to accelerate pupils' progress are linked explicitly to the quality of teaching.

At the time of the last monitoring visit, progress leaders had recently been assigned to each year group. Their role is to check that every pupil is making the progress they should. Progress leaders have a detailed understanding of individual pupils' needs. They undertake close monitoring activities, including identifying barriers to learning. They take action to overcome such barriers, for example by supporting pupils' behaviour. They liaise with other teachers, including middle and senior leaders, to ensure that pupils' needs are met. The headteacher has made sure that progress leaders have the authority to challenge and support both staff and pupils. They are thus empowered to bring about necessary improvements. Equally, progress leaders are held to account through rigorous meetings with the RSL.

Work to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has focused on developing teachers' understanding of good practice. At the time of the last monitoring visit, leaders were in the process of developing a coaching programme. This was introduced in February 2018. Leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses in individual teachers' practice and design professional development activities around individuals' needs. Staff are supported and challenged accordingly. Leaders and teachers are positive about the impact that this is having on classroom practice. The infancy of the programme, however, means it is too soon to evaluate its impact. The new performance management policy is robust and reinforces teachers' accountability.

At the time of the last monitoring visit, the headteacher had responded to feedback from pupils and amended the timings of the school day. This was received positively by pupils and staff alike. The headteacher has undertaken a full review of the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of a changing intake, while maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum. This has involved a further review of the school day. These changes will be implemented in September 2018.

Considerable work has been undertaken to improve the quality of provision in the mathematics department. The new senior vice-principal has taken responsibility, using his expertise in this subject, for supporting the newly appointed head of department. Together, they have been effective in identifying weaknesses and taking action to tackle them. The head of department has high expectations of staff and pupils, and has introduced strategies to bring about much needed improvement. She recognises that much work remains to be done. Clear and strategic plans are in place for further improvement.

Following the last monitoring visit, leaders took swift action to improve the school's use of pupil premium funding. Allocation of funding is carefully planned and linked to whole-school priorities. Leaders check spending and are beginning to evaluate its impact. The SIB is thus able to hold leaders to account for its use.

The leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has been strengthened further since the last monitoring visit. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is strategic in her approach to securing improvement in this aspect of the school's work. She has delivered training to all staff to help them understand how they can support these pupils to succeed. She has produced detailed guidance materials which highlight individual pupils' needs and strategies that can be used to support them. The SENCo has sought pupils' and parents' views to underpin this work. She has acted on their feedback to ensure that the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities improves. The SENCo checks that pupils' needs are met and is tenacious in following up concerns when they arise. The SENCo is held to account via meetings with the RSL and members of the SIB.

The last monitoring visit identified the need to improve the leadership of the sixth form. Since January 2018, the senior vice-principal has been supporting leadership of this aspect of the school's provision. Leaders have begun to monitor the effectiveness of the sixth form by undertaking lesson observations and examining students' work. They now have a more accurate picture of the sixth form and are better placed to support improvements. Leaders have found new ways to help future students select appropriate courses. For example, current sixth-form students act as mentors to younger pupils, offering advice and explaining aspects of different courses. Plans are in place to enhance the guidance further. For example, pupils in Year 11 will be offered an opportunity to observe sixth-form lessons to help them understand the expectations and requirements of courses before they enrol. Leaders are also mentoring current sixth-form students to help them succeed in their courses and continue with their studies into Year 13. Current information indicates that the proportion of students in Year 12 who will continue with their studies into Year 13 will be considerably higher than in 2017.

The SIB continues to provide effective challenge and support. Its members have a clear understanding of the school's weaknesses and monitor closely the work being done to bring about improvements. Meetings are well attended and members of the SIB maintain an up-to-date understanding of progress against the school's improvement plan. Following the last monitoring visit, the SIB increased levels of accountability by inviting leaders to meetings. The SIB effectively challenges leaders about the impact of their action plans.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last monitoring visit but inconsistencies remain. Some teachers use their strong subject knowledge effectively to plan activities which interest and motivate pupils. These teachers use questioning well to probe and develop pupils' understanding. They plan activities that meet pupils' different needs and provide effective support and challenge. There are still many examples, however, of teaching which requires significant improvement. For example, many do not use information about what pupils already understand and can do to plan activities that challenge them. Some weak teaching does not support pupils to develop positive habits for learning. They become uninterested and drift into off-task behaviour that results in low-level disruption. Leaders are fully aware of the weaker practice in the school and are taking action to challenge and support staff to improve.

The framework to help teachers to plan to meet the needs of different abilities is now well established. All lessons are planned to incorporate a range of activities called 'cautious', 'confident', 'challenge' and 'challenge plus'. Some teachers, however, do not understand the expectations of this framework. For example, they plan different activities but these do not provide different levels of challenge. Leaders recognise that teachers do not all have the skills they need to plan activities that develop pupils' learning. They are taking action to tackle this issue.

The inspection in December 2016 identified the inconsistent application of the school's assessment and feedback policy. Leaders introduced a new, simplified policy in July 2017. This has been effective in ensuring that teachers check pupils' work and their progress more regularly than in the past. In addition, the introduction of 'target time' provides pupils with opportunities to reflect on and improve their work. Not all teachers, however, check pupils' work closely enough. This means they do not provide them with the timely intervention they need to catch up. There are also inconsistencies in the application of the literacy policy across the curriculum. Leaders plan to revise the policy to support staff in this aspect of the school's work. This will be explored at the next monitoring visit.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have introduced a new tutor programme which promotes pupils' personal development and well-being. It covers an extensive range of topics that are pertinent to pupils' needs. For example, pupils learn about anxiety and stress management. Activities are closely linked to the school's values and maintain a focus on the school's aims and high expectations.

Pupils' conduct is good. Instances of low-level disruption are the result of weaker teaching when pupils' needs are not met. The behaviour policy is applied by the majority of staff but pupils said that some teachers do not apply it consistently. Leaders are aware of these inconsistencies and are supporting and challenging staff where necessary. Pupils are happy and safe. They said that bullying is dealt with effectively. Pupils are taught about diversity and recognise the importance of tolerance and understanding of those who are different from themselves. Some pupils, however, said that homophobic and derogatory language is used.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils have made considerably slower progress in recent years than that seen nationally. Improvements in the quality of teaching are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. Leaders' tracking information indicates that pupils' attainment is likely to improve slightly in 2018 but remain below the national average. Disadvantaged pupils have made very slow progress in recent years. Strategies to accelerate progress of pupils in this group are not yet having an effect. This remains an area of considerable concern. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are beginning to make faster progress. Younger pupils are also making faster progress because they have not fallen behind to the extent that their older peers did. Pupils in Year 7, including disadvantaged pupils, are making rapid progress in reading.

Improvements in the sixth form are evident in students' attainment and progress. Leaders expect students' progress to be above the national average in 2018. Boys are making faster progress than they were and leaders expect boys' progress in 2018 to exceed the national average.

External support

The trust continues to provide effective support. For example, it has commissioned external reviews to help middle leaders to improve their practice. Leaders have worked with other schools in the trust to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. For example, primary school staff have shared examples of work from pupils in Year 6. Leaders are developing plans with primary schools in the trust to establish transition projects. Leaders are also actively seeking external support. For example, senior and middle leaders have visited other schools to learn from their best practice.