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Mr T Bennett
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Dear Mr Bennett

Implementation of Meade Hill Special School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Eric Craven HMI to your school on 18 and 19 May 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Manchester. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF MEADE HILL SPECIAL SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit eight lessons or parts of lessons, including two off-site sessions, and one assembly were inspected. A training session for staff was also observed. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the principal of the federation, the chair of governors and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the principal of the federation, the chair of the governing body and two representatives from the LEA.

A new timetable, which reduces the number of daily lessons, has been introduced. This has helpfully lessened the frequency of movement of pupils around the school. An appointment of a deputy headteacher has been made for September 2005. Two teachers, who are absent, have been replaced by temporary teachers and two other teachers, who are on fixed-term contracts, are due to leave the school at the end of term. This will result in a planned reduction of one teacher for September 2005. The school's pastoral support manager has returned to work following a lengthy absence. The behaviour support manager is now based at another of the federation's schools but remains in regular contact with the school, offering support and guidance and visiting on occasion to monitor the system for behaviour management. Plans are emerging, as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme, for the school to move to purpose-built premises.

Eleven of the 12 Year 9 pupils took the end-of-Key Stage 3 national tests this year. Although the results are not yet available, the headteacher expects three of the pupils to achieve Level 5 in English and five to reach at least this level in mathematics. No pupils took GCSE examinations in 2005. The school's assessments, using the National Curriculum levels, indicate that a few pupils, currently in Key Stage 3 in the main, are capable of gaining GCSE qualifications in English, mathematics and science. The reading ages of most of the pupils in Key Stage 3, who were at the school in September 2004, have increased, with a little over half of them achieving gains in excess of increases to their chronological ages. The school's tracking system shows that the majority of the pupils have made at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress this academic year in the core National Curriculum subjects. However, the poor attendance of some pupils has significantly impeded their progress.

The pupils' learning was good in four lessons and satisfactory in four. In a Key Stage 3 English lesson the one pupil in attendance made good progress in learning about the effects of homelessness. He gave good answers to the teacher's questions about the emotions felt by a homeless person and he prepared his work for display earnestly. He was keen to express his ideas because the issue captured his imagination, offering his experience of encountering homeless people. In a Key Stage 3 physical education lesson the pupils' interest in football was harnessed well and their achievement was good. In learning how to control and power a football shot they practised the drills with enthusiasm and control and learned how best to position themselves.

The quality of teaching was good in four lessons and satisfactory in four. The improvements in teaching seen at the last visit have been sustained. A common format for lesson planning is used by most teachers; however, temporary staff are not using the template. The best plans included timings for the elements of the lesson, a clear description of the work of the teaching assistants, and learning targets. In a good English lesson the teacher adapted the lesson plan appropriately when she discovered only one pupil was present. Praise was used judiciously and meaningfully. She used the agreed system for managing behaviour effectively and reminded the pupil of the behavioural target displayed on the board. Resources were readily available and contributed to the suitable pace of the lesson. The teaching assistant worked in harmony with the teacher and at one point related an experience from her own childhood which helped the pupil appreciate a teaching point. In a Key Stage 3 mathematics lesson the good plan helped the teacher deliver a well-structured lesson. Questions were appropriately tailored to the abilities of the pupils and the teaching assistants intervened in ways which suitably challenged the pupils' thinking. Displays around the school are attractive and celebrate the pupils' work well; many are annotated with the National Curriculum level of the pupils' work, which is helping them understand how well they are doing and how they can improve.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good in five lessons and satisfactory in three. No unsatisfactory behaviour was observed; this is an improvement on the last visit. The incidence of swearing has reduced; when it occurred it was swiftly challenged by the staff. The younger pupils in particular are becoming accustomed to using the newly agreed terms of 'sir' and 'miss' when talking with staff although some of the older pupils are finding this difficult to accommodate. The respect shown to staff has improved overall; there were many fewer incidents of back-chat and derogatory remarks. Where behaviour and attitudes were good in lessons, the pupils responded quickly to the staff's requests and were polite in their interactions or when asking questions. The pupils displayed positive attitudes to learning; they were generally enthusiastic and motivated by the content of the lesson and they were keen to engage in the work. They appreciated and valued the ticks and

merits they received. In the occasional lesson and around the school, when a pupil was truculent, the members of staff dealt with this appropriately and as unobtrusively as possible.

The small numbers on roll mean that poor attendance by a few pupils affects the overall attendance rate markedly. There are a few non-attending Year 11 pupils who remain on the school's register. The school has taken appropriate action to increase the overall attendance and works closely with the attendance improvement service (AIS). The AIS has instigated court proceedings in one case. Nevertheless, the attendance of the pupils is currently 51 per cent and is unsatisfactory. The attendance has reached 63 per cent this term and, when calculated without the intransigent non-attenders, the rate has reached 81 per cent. All pupils have weekly attendance targets and rewards are provided for those pupils achieving 100 per cent attendance in a week and for those improving their previous attendance rate. An attendance policy for the federation has been agreed and staff have received training from AIS. A form time, when tutors discuss attendance targets with their pupils, has recently been introduced.

The number of days lost to fixed-term exclusions has recently begun to reduce. This was predicted by the school after a rise in fixed-term exclusions following the introduction of the system for managing behaviour. Forty-seven days were lost to fixed-term exclusions in April 2005 compared with 60 days in March; the length of the exclusions has reduced overall as has the number of pupils requiring this sanction. The school has recognised that the threat of exclusion is not a deterrent for a small number of pupils and has wisely widened the range of sanctions.

The headteacher has gained the support of the staff and maintains a clear presence around the school. Morale is good despite the challenges faced by the school. There is a strong focus on improving teaching and learning, and staff have been receptive to the support and guidance they have received. Teamwork among the staff has improved and the headteacher and principal have enabled teaching assistants to be fully involved in the work of the school. The work of some subject co-ordinators has been hampered by staff absence. The principal is leading the federation very well and she gives good support to the headteacher.

The link adviser has been pivotal in co-ordinating the input from the LEA's Key Stage 3 strategy consultants as well as delivering in-service training for staff on the role of the form tutor. She has met regularly with the headteacher and has helpfully contributed to the school's programme of monitoring teaching and learning. Her support has been greatly valued by the school.

The headteacher's first written report to the governing body was succinct and contained helpful information. However, it failed to report on the quality of

teaching and learning, and notably the progress made by the pupils. There are useful plans to create a template for reports to the governing body. Helpfully, training sessions have been arranged for nominated governors responsible for attendance and special educational needs.

Action taken to address the key issues

1. raise expectations about what can be achieved and improve pupils' achievement by setting appropriate individual learning targets

Behavioural targets are frequently updated, are well known by the pupils and are referred to regularly by staff. However, the use of learning targets has lagged behind. They are being included in some lesson plans but this is not consistent. When used, they are effective in helping the teacher match work to the individual needs of the pupils.

Progress has been reasonable.

2. improve the quality of provision for social, moral spiritual and cultural education

The introduction of form time and the use of facilities in the local and wider community has made a positive contribution to the pupils' social, moral and cultural experience.

Progress is reasonable.

3. improve the level of challenge in teaching and learning so that pupil achievement and attitudes are improved

Training for teachers and assistants on improving teaching and learning has been beneficial. The co-coaching programme has been expanded and includes teaching assistants. The after-school training session observed reinforced training from an external consultant. It was a valuable contribution to the development of teaching aimed at capturing the pupils' interest. Staff were keen and receptive and this training holds much promise. The level of challenge is improving in some lessons as teachers begin to incorporate learning targets in to their planning and give due consideration to the attainment levels of the pupils.

Progress has been reasonable.

4. improve leadership and management so that there is a strong focus on raising standards and reviewing all aspects of the school's work

The monitoring arrangements are becoming embedded into school practice. Lesson plans and the pupils' targets are regularly monitored by senior managers. The sheet for recording lesson observations has been revised and observations have been undertaken by the link adviser, with oral and written feedback for teachers. The headteacher and the principal of the federation have not undertaken further lesson observations but there are plans for them to do so. The analyses of behaviour and attendance data are good and targets have been set as a result. Regular review meetings between the headteacher and core curriculum co-ordinators are held. However, attainment data is insufficiently well used by management to hold staff to account.

Progress has been reasonable.

5. improve attitudes and behaviour and reduce exclusions

Alternative, off-site provision has been used effectively to meet the needs of some very disruptive pupils and this has had positive effects on the pupils remaining at the school. The pupils know their behavioural targets and they are generally working industriously to achieve rewards. The use of the 'good news book' at assembly is usefully contributing to the development of more positive attitudes and behaviour. Training in the use of the school's system for managing behaviour has continued and staff are more consistent in its application. The introduction of a support base, staffed by a teacher, where pupils who have to leave classrooms can continue with their work, is a positive development.

Progress has been good.

6. improve pupil learning through ICT

Most of the pupils are receiving focused literacy and numeracy support using computer software aimed at accelerating learning. This is a recent introduction and its impact on the progress made by the pupils is yet to be evaluated. However, its regular and systematic approach holds much promise. The school has installed a further three interactive whiteboards and nine computers have been set up in pupils' homes by the ICT co-ordinator.

Progress is reasonable.

7. improve subject expertise, share good practice and establish team working and collaboration across the federation

The principal is promoting shared good practice and collaboration across the federation very well. The opportunities for staff to work together are increasing. Teachers from the two other schools in the federation are ably supporting the supply teachers for English and science at Meade Hill. Arrangements for performance management are to be introduced for all non-teaching staff across the federation from September 2005. There are plans for a joint residential experience for pupils from the three federation schools and for combined outdoor pursuits.

Progress is good.

8. ensure governance is satisfactory and all statutory requirements are met

Supported by the principal and the school's link adviser, the governing body is forging its new role and continues to be supportive of the school. The minutes of the meetings reflect due consideration of the reports that have been tabled. There are currently vacancies for parent governors.

Progress has been reasonable.