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Mr A Pearson
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pearson

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Maidenhill School

Introduction

Following my visit with Raye Allison-Smith, Charlotte Evers and Mick Saunders, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 15 and 16 May 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle managers, three groups of pupils, governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA). They attended one assembly and looked at pupils' work.

Context

Following the inspection in November 2006 a deputy headteacher was seconded to the school until August 2007. Four temporary additional governors were appointed to the governing body. In April 2007, a new deputy headteacher joined the school and an assistant headteacher is due to start in June 2007. There are a significant number of vacant teaching posts as a result of a high level of staff turnover and absence.

Achievement and standards

Following the previous inspection, the senior management acted swiftly to halt the sharp decline in standards and a number of important actions were instigated to improve the pupils' performance. A rigorous analysis of the mock exam results for Year 11 took place to identify underachievement of individual pupils in all subject areas. These groups, particularly the average attaining pupils, were targeted appropriately and their progress monitored robustly by senior leaders. Detailed records show clear progress in the core subjects during the spring term and point to an increase in the number of pupils who are likely to achieve at grade C in English, mathematics and science in the 2007 GCSE examinations.

Similarly, Year 9 pupils were set realistic targets for achievement at the end of Key Stage 3 through the use of Fischer Family Trust benchmark data, and tracking records show progress in all three core subjects. Despite this recent improvement, pupils' attainment remains well below average due to their exceptionally low starting points. The senior team has worked hard to improve teaching and the use of assessment. This has led to some improvement in pupils' achievement in some classes where teaching is good or better. However, in most subjects, pupils' progress and standards still vary considerably across the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- improve standards and pupils' achievement, especially for the average attaining pupils, in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The headteacher and senior team are working tirelessly to improve the pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. In close consultation with staff and pupils, a sensible new 'behaviour for learning' policy has recently been agreed. It is due to be launched imminently. Most teachers are trying hard to implement the new strategy and to tackle instances of challenging behaviour in a calm and patient way. That said, this strategy is at a very early stage of implementation and, as yet, it has not had enough time to effect noticeable improvement in the pupils' behaviour. Many pupils did behave well, particularly when lessons were stimulating; in the assembly most listened attentively. Nonetheless, as noted on the previous inspection, there are still a significant minority of pupils who misbehave in lessons. There were several instances where pupils behaved in a defiant and disrespectful manner to adults and sought overtly to disrupt learning, despite receiving constant reminders of the consequences. Around the school behaviour continues to be boisterous. Several pupils exhibit a lack of control together with a lack of courtesy to adults and their peers. On occasions noise levels are far too high; this is very often the case in crowded areas, where the problem is exacerbated. Despite the very best efforts of

senior leaders and several staff to maintain a high presence during these times, supervision needs to be strengthened.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- significantly reduce the poor behaviour of the minority of pupils – inadequate.

Quality of provision

Rigorous monitoring by senior leaders, coupled with good professional development programmes for staff, has led to pleasing improvements in teaching. It is now satisfactory overall. There is more good teaching and less inadequate teaching. However, it is still not consistently good enough across the school to ensure the majority of pupils progress at a fast rate to reach the standards expected for their age and abilities. Variations within subjects still exist and senior managers are tackling these assiduously.

In most lessons pupils are now much clearer about the purpose of their learning and lesson plans follow an agreed format. There are now more opportunities for pupils to reflect on what has been learnt but this time is not always used constructively to move learning forward. Pupils worked with enthusiasm when teachers set high expectations and used a range of stimulating activities to encourage independent and collaborative learning. In these lessons pupils' behaviour and progress were invariably good. However, at present, this tends to be the exception rather than the norm. In contrast, many activities were too teacher directed and tasks planned did not encourage pupils to take responsibility for their learning. As a consequence, the slow pace of learning stultified the pupils' progress. In several classes pupils' behaviour was poor, often as a result of weak classroom management.

The quality of marking is inconsistent across the school and at times is inadequate. Pupils' work is not marked regularly enough and there are insufficient comments to give pupils a clear indication of the level at which they are working, or what they need to do to improve. The internal exclusion centre continues to be increasingly effective in managing poor behaviour and the school's rigorous monitoring shows a significant reduction in the exclusion rate since it was first established; no mean feat within a short time scale. The school continues to do all it can to continue to improve attendance, which has fallen slightly to below the national average since the last inspection. The imaginative Every Day Matters initiative is helping pupils, their parents and carers to understand that regular attendance is vital to achieving well at school. Child protection procedures meet current requirements.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that the variations in standards in different subjects are markedly reduced – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is continuing to provide strong, energetic leadership and he is tackling difficult challenges in a decisive way. The new senior team are focused relentlessly on raising standards and possess the collective skills to bring about improvement. All are working exceptionally hard to do so, with impressive commitment and a steely resolve. Appropriate systems to analyse performance data to identify underachievement have been introduced and senior leaders are tracking the pupils' progress assiduously. The involvement of subject leaders in academic monitoring is still at a very early stage, as is the use of assessment data by teachers to set challenging targets. This remains inconsistent and variable in quality across the school.

Senior leaders, supported by external partners, are monitoring teaching robustly. All have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses. Monitoring records are detailed and show an improving profile. Indeed, there is no room for complacency and the headteacher has taken swift, but necessary, action to confront inadequate teaching. Most teachers have responded well to the constructive advice received and are beginning to reflect upon their practice. All subject leaders have yet to develop their monitoring role.

The senior team, in close consultation with governors, has evaluated carefully the findings of all monitoring and developed a structured action plan for improvement. Whilst much has been achieved by the senior team, developments are not embedded fully at all levels within the school.

The governing body are committed to improving the quality of education and are now more informed about the performance of the school. Appropriate structures are in place for effective governance and they are beginning to develop their monitoring role to hold the school to account.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- make better use of assessment information and monitor the school's provision systematically and rigorously to improve performance and standards – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority took appropriate action to strengthen the capacity in the school's leadership when it was made subject to special measures. The deputy headteacher, seconded to the school from the LA, has made a significant contribution to improvements at a senior level. The collective expertise of the additional governors has also strengthened the capacity of the governing body. In order to bring about the rapid improvement necessary if the ambitious target date set for the removal of

special measures is to be achieved, it will be important for the school and senior LA officers to continue to work in close partnership.

The local authority statement of action, although a satisfactory plan, was not developed in close consultation with the school. The school draft action plan and the LA statement of action are not matched closely enough.

The school values the support by the LA advisers and consultants and the work of the external management consultants as identified in the LA statement. The formal reviews in English, mathematics, science, behaviour and attendance were well received by senior leaders and the outcomes have informed the school's action plan. The recent monitoring of teaching and learning by the external consultant has been helpful to the school.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to continued agreement with Ofsted.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Mary Harlow
H M Inspector