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27 February 2008

Mr A Pearson
The Headteacher
Maidenhill School
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GL10 2HA

Dear Mr Pearson

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF MAIDENHILL SCHOOL

Following my visit with Timothy Gilson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 February 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to approval by Ofsted.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Group Director of Children's and Young People's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Mary Harlow
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF MAIDENHILL SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 12 and 13 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and held telephone discussions with the chair of the governing body and the School Improvement Partner (SIP). Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle managers, two groups of pupils, two governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Following the second monitoring visit in October 2007 the secondment of the additional deputy headteacher was extended until March 2008. The school has been successful in appointing permanent teaching staff in English and science for September 2008. It still continues to have difficulties recruiting permanent staff, particularly in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Standards at Key Stage 4 remain below average and pupils' progress is inadequate. In some subjects, notably mathematics, inconsistent teaching due to serious staffing problems is preventing students from making sufficient progress. More able students are held back in many subjects due to a lack of challenge. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not monitored rigorously and their progress is inadequate.

Improvements in the quality of teaching across the curriculum are beginning to raise standards and improve progress for most students in lessons. Student behaviour in lessons continues to improve because of a more consistent approach to behaviour management. As a result, interruptions to learning are less frequent.

The senior leadership team continues to make good progress in establishing a robust system for data tracking in order to monitor the progress of students. However, the impact of this system on students is limited because many staff, including some subject leaders, are not making effective use of the data. Not all teachers are confident in the use of the data and some of their predictions for student achievement are inaccurate. The school has set some ambitious targets for Year 11 students taking GCSE examinations in the summer. However, the basis for these is not entirely secure and there is presently insufficient data available to indicate the targets will be achieved.

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 strengths noted at the last monitoring inspection have been maintained. The students' behaviour is satisfactory overall and in an increasing proportion of lessons it is good. This is partly due to the assiduous monitoring by the senior leadership team, coupled with the continued improvements in teaching. Students report that when teachers provide them with stimulating, practical activities where they can work both independently and collectively together, behaviour is good. And, they are right. In such lessons, as observed in English, science and the performing arts, sanctions are used sparingly if at all. As a consequence, the students respect the adults and each other; they are motivated to learn and work enthusiastically, often with commendable levels of concentration. However, where the management of behaviour dominates lessons and teaching is controlling and often dull, the pupils become passive and disengaged.

The senior leadership team is very active and high profile around the school, both dropping into lessons and at break times. This has created a calmer atmosphere and a more positive climate for learning. Most students now move sensibly in the corridors but, on occasions, particularly in areas unsupervised, pockets of boisterous behaviour remain.

Both year leaders and heads of department are unclear about their role in managing the students' behaviour and their role in the 'behaviour for learning' structure. The school's systems for monitoring students' personal development are, at present, not sufficiently 'joined up' and responsibilities are imprecise.

The school has continued with its robust efforts to try to bring about improvements to students' attendance. Overall, this remains satisfactory. Lateness and punctuality to lessons continues to improve but this still needs careful monitoring and intervention as a minority of students do not arrive to school or lessons on time. Unauthorised absence remains high because the school continues to adopt a much tougher stance on students taking holidays in term time.

The referral room continues to make a positive contribution to the improvement in behaviour. Systems for monitoring unsatisfactory incidents are comprehensive and analysed carefully. This is leading to a reduction in fixed term and permanent exclusions.

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

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

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and the proportion of good lessons continues to increase. No inadequate teaching was observed during this visit. Where teaching is most effective, students learn independently and they work well together. In satisfactory lessons, there is a lack of challenge, slow pace and an overreliance on the teacher. Most lessons are well planned and structured clearly. Teachers are making effective use of interactive whiteboards to provide appropriate stimulus and

modelling. There are positive relationships between staff and students. Staff shortages in core subjects, such as in mathematics and science, mean that too many lessons rely on short term temporary staff who do not know the students well enough and are not always subject specialists. This is impeding the progress of some pupils; it also has an adverse effect on their behaviour.

The school has developed an imaginative and appropriate curriculum for Key Stage 4. Students now choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses which are well matched to their needs and interests. The school's specialism in performing arts is having an increasing influence on the range of courses on offer. There is an extensive programme of revision and study skills support for students in Key Stage 4. The school has a good range of extra-curricular activities, although students report that they would appreciate more lunchtime clubs.

The quality of marking remains variable between subjects, with students saying that their work is hardly marked at all in some lessons. Key Stage 4 students appreciate the continuous assessment and useful comments on coursework that they receive in some lessons, such as in English and the performing arts. Students are not sufficiently aware of their targets and are unclear about what they need to do to improve in many subjects.

The effective and imaginative programme of professional development is enabling teachers to share good practice and develop their skills. Teachers are clear that 'learning focus' time and the work of the reflective practitioners' group are instrumental in improving the quality of teaching. There is an extensive programme of lesson observations to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and appropriate opportunities for sharing best practice.

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

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

Leadership and management

Both staff and students value the continued committed leadership of the headteacher and his strong desire to improve the quality of education on offer. The senior team is energetic and all members remain relentlessly focused on raising standards. Moreover, they possess a steely resolve to do so and there is a zero tolerance of underachievement. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching continue to be rigorous at a senior level, and the team possesses an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Appropriate plans are in place to develop a new shared ethos and culture for learning; the time is now ripe for this to happen.

Some middle leaders are growing more confident in their use of data, although there is considerable variation in their understanding and expertise. Many are uncertain about the data that they are given and unclear about how best to use it in their subject areas or year groups to ensure the students progress at a swift pace. Whilst there is a very well designed central system for data analysis, this is not being used effectively by all staff to raise standards. The leadership of the performing arts

continues to go from strength to strength and the specialism is now having clear benefits across the school.

Leadership of professional development has been creative and effective. Performance management is thorough and staff targets are linked successfully to school improvement priorities and appropriate professional development. Induction arrangements for new staff are satisfactory.

The governing body is more informed about its role in driving the improvement agenda; it now needs to hold the school to account in a challenging manner.

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 school continues to value the support received from the LA consultants, the School Improvement Partner and the leader for intervention and challenge. That said, continued support at all levels, particularly for middle leadership, is critical if the school is to improve at the swift pace necessary. Given the issues that have just come to a head in mathematics due to extraneous circumstances, it is now imperative that the department receives significant front line practical support.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the capacity and accountability of middle leaders for raising standards and improve their use of data to monitor the students' achievement.