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26 November 2009

Mrs A Schofield
Buglawton Hall School
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Dear Mrs Schofield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Buglawton Hall School

Following my visit with Michelle Moss, Social Care Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2008. 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 not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of Governors and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Broomhead
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Buglawton Hall School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including six lessons or parts of lessons and aspects of the residential provision. They also met with students, staff and senior managers including the head of centre, the head of care, the acting deputy headteacher, and also met the chair of the interim executive board, the acting executive principal of the federation, the senior school effectiveness officer and a representative from the local authority management support group for human resources.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in July 2009, newly appointed senior managers have taken up post including the head of centre (which includes the role of headteacher) and the head of care. Additional staff have been recruited on a temporary basis; these include care workers and teaching assistants. The school has appointed a substantive English teacher, who takes up post in January 2010. This vacancy is currently covered by a supply teacher. Most of the building and renovation work is now complete and new residential premises and education facilities are in full use. The school has 25 students on roll, 6 of whom are day students who attend off-site educational provision in Manchester. The school is able to admit up to 40 students on roll, but governors have decided that admissions will be limited until the school comes out of special measures.

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Standards remain variable and below average for most students, although it is encouraging to see that a few are beginning to demonstrate their potential to reach standards in line with national expectations for their age. Achievement continues to be strongest in mathematics, science, art, and information and communication technology. Progress is also variable and very much dependant on students' attendance and emotional stability. Results for Year 11 examinations in summer 2009 were disappointing compared with expectations; examination entries were adversely affected by staff changes which hindered continuity in studies in some subjects such as English. In the lessons seen on this visit students showed a positive attitude to school and to learning and they were responding well to what is expected of them.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve achievement in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant outcomes

Students' behaviour in lessons and around school continues to be generally good. Relationships between staff and students are very good and based on mutual respect. Inspectors were impressed with the courtesy, maturity and rational thinking shown by students when they were giving their views about the school. They say they enjoy school and are positive about the improvements which have been made to the buildings. They also value the individual support they get and enjoy being taught in small groups. However, they do have some concerns about the staff changes and the effect this has had on their learning, for example in English. They also feel that they are not as involved as they could be in decisions about the school. They now have a wider range of after-school clubs and activities to take part in. Outdoor education is also a regular feature of each student's weekly programme. Opportunities for students to learn about their own and other cultures remain limited to those afforded within art, music and occasional theme days. Some students learn about different religions and beliefs but the school does not have a planned programme to underpin this study. The school is at the early stages of planning to improve this aspect of provision.

Attendance is improving for some individual students; some who were persistent non-attenders are now regular attenders at off-site day provision. Unusually high levels of sickness in the autumn term have affected the overall attendance figure, but it is currently around 83%. Of the seven students who left Year 11 in the summer, four went into further education or training and the destinations of the other three are not yet confirmed.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that opportunities are provided for pupils to understand and appreciate the values and cultures of the school's diverse population – inadequate.

The effectiveness of provision

Although there have been staff changes, the school has successfully maintained its generally good standard of teaching. This is due to the enthusiasm and commitment of individual teachers and the collaborative style of managers who involve teaching staff in developments and value their expertise. There have been improvements to teachers' planning, with a clearer focus on differing learning objectives for individual students, but the link between these and students' current and expected attainment is not explicit, making it more difficult for staff to track progress over time. Students are now routinely involved in assessing how well they have met the lesson objectives and most engage positively with this process. Relationships between staff and students are very positive and respectful. Teachers are skilled in managing

behaviour in a calm and professional manner. Students are willing to ask and answer questions and to offer ideas knowing that their suggestions will be treated with respect and valued. They use technical vocabulary with increasing confidence. The dedicated team of teaching assistants contributes very effectively to subject expertise, stability in lessons and continuity in students' learning. The pace of lessons is good and individuals are given very good individual support which helps them to remain focused on their work. Where lessons are weaker, teachers do not gain the attention of the group before giving explanations or instructions so that some students do not hear or understand what is being said.

There is an increasing focus on developing the curriculum at Key Stage 4 in respect of vocational education and the functional skills which students will need in adult life. At Key Stages 2 and 3 provision for modern foreign languages remains limited. Discrete sessions have been included in the weekly timetable focused on promoting students' social and emotional development; these complement the already good provision which spans care and education to support pupils' personal development. However, provision for health and sex education is more informal and it is left to individual staff to decide what to teach and how to approach this subject. The school has strengthened further the outdoor education provision and has recently introduced programmes leading to Prince's Trust and Duke of Edinburgh awards.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning – satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support, and boarding provision

The majority of the difficulties that were hindering progress in the residential provision are now starting to be resolved and resulting in more enhanced care. However, despite this progress, there remain a number of shortfalls that cross over a number of the national minimum standards.

Where progress has been secured, outcomes for students are improving. This includes students now enjoying a higher staffing ratio that enables them to get more individual attention. The confidence of care staff has grown and they have the support of a dedicated management team. Students' education is valued by care staff and is incorporated into recreational activities that promote informal learning as well as increasing social skills. There are greater links with community-based clubs that enable pupils to aspire to and pursue hobbies and interests. The relationship between care staff and pupils is based on mutual respect and understanding with professional boundaries established, to ensure that effective care and support is achieved.

The management of students' behaviour is much more focused on effective communication and using de-escalation techniques and this is starting to decrease

the use of physical intervention. Nevertheless, the recording of physical intervention is not sufficiently detailed to give assurance that the use of restraint is always reasonably applied. However, there is a good monitoring system in place which is highlighting any patterns and trends.

There continue to be weaknesses in the school's arrangements for keeping students safe, including those areas relating to countering bullying, fire safety, recruitment, the complaints procedure for pupils and procedures for ensuring that events affecting the safety and welfare of boarders are notified to the appropriate bodies. Reasonable progress has been made in ensuring that all care staff are familiar with safeguarding procedures, although this is still not comprehensive. Staff are receiving good-quality training opportunities to increase their knowledge in promoting pupils' welfare, but some gaps remain, such as in food hygiene. Safe administration of medicines is steadily helping to promote students' health, but the school is not obtaining the necessary permission from parents and carers, for example in relation to giving first aid and over-the-counter remedies.

Each student has a placement plan that gives a general overview of the individual's health, care, education and risks. However, it is not comprehensive and does not encourage students to be involved in drawing up and reviewing the plan. Also, targets in individual care and education plans are too vague, making it difficult for students to know how well they are progressing.

The school has not identified for each student at least one person who is independent who they may contact directly about personal problems or concerns. Furthermore, students are not always able to access a telephone without first seeking permission of a member of staff. These limitations restrict students exercising their rights.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the care provided to ensure the health, safety and well-being of students and staff, and ensure that the school meets all the boarding national minimum standards which were unmet at the time of the inspection in October 2008 – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new senior managers have quickly become established in their roles and have brought greater stability and sense of purpose to the school. The head of centre has a clear vision for improving the education and care to meet students' emotional, social and academic needs, recognising the importance of preparing them for adult life in the wider community. Under her leadership and with support from the local authority the school has begun to look outwards to work in partnership with others.

Staff contribute willingly to school improvement and are keen to undertake training and engage in partnership with other schools to share good practice.

The school has been through a period of significant change, both in staffing and in the building and renovation programme. The accommodation is now of a better standard and the general school environment is pleasant and welcoming. The staff and students have coped admirably with all this change. The school has acted swiftly to fill vacancies in teaching and care staff roles and in doing so has successfully increased the expertise available. The decision to appoint a dedicated team of teaching assistants is proving very effective in promoting students' learning and positive attitudes to school. However, some posts are of a temporary nature, posing a risk of further staff changes at a time when the school needs to gain as much stability as possible.

Leaders and managers are increasingly focusing their attention on monitoring the quality of provision. They have a broadly accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and are aware of the improvements needed in the curriculum. The school is in discussion with external providers to introduce information management systems to support the tracking and analysis of students' attainment and to enable the school to compare the progress students are making with those with similar needs elsewhere.

Improvements are also being made in the quality of care, although the school is still failing to meet all national minimum standards. Staff morale is high and students talk about how much calmer it is in the residential accommodation.

School improvement planning is becoming sharper, although it is not as precise as it could be about the progress being made against targets.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Secure the leadership and management of the school – satisfactory.

External support

The school is receiving good, focused external support from the local authority and from a national leader in education through Greater Manchester Challenge. This is helping to bring clarity of direction for the school, more accurate self-evaluation and a range of opportunities to observe and share good practice. The school effectiveness officer has conducted joint lesson observations with the head of centre and confirmed the school's broadly accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. The School Improvement Partner is due to visit the school in the next week. The school continues to be closely monitored by the acting executive principal of the federation and the interim executive board and they are aware of the need to ensure that all support is carefully coordinated so that leaders and managers are not overwhelmed or pulled in different directions. The interim executive board has been

very effective in recruiting senior managers and teaching and care staff to the school, adding to its expertise and growing capacity. It is acutely aware of the importance of improving stability through permanency of appointments.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve attendance.
- Ensure that individual care and education targets are sufficiently precise so that students know what they are aiming for and how they are going to achieve these targets.
- Establish a whole-school policy and programme for teaching health and sex education.
- Extend the opportunities for students to develop their spiritual and cultural awareness.
- Continue to address remaining failings against national minimum standards.