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Ms Margaret Peacock
The Headteacher
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Dear Margaret

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Elliott School

Following my visit with Brian Evans and Nasim Butt, additional inspectors, to your school on 29 and 30 September 2009, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures is satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed at this stage.

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 the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Wandsworth.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Elliott School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 September 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work through observing lessons, a scrutiny of documents and pupils' work, and met with the headteacher, senior and middle managers, groups of pupils, the chair of the interim governing body and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection the school has experienced much staffing turbulence following an organisational review, initiated by the previous headteacher before her departure in April 2009. This resulted in staff changes at senior, middle and teacher levels. Since September 2009, a new senior leadership team is now in place with two new deputies and four assistant headteachers with joint pastoral and academic responsibilities. An executive headteacher took up post in June 2009, who is headteacher of Chestnut Grove School, a Leadership Partnership School. She is currently working four days at Elliott School and it is envisaged that the substantive headteacher post will be filled by April 2010. An interim executive board is in place and, in addition, there is a partnership that meets regularly, comprising of representatives from the local authority, London Challenge advisors, Graveney School that is a Raising Achievement School and Chestnut Grove School, that provides leadership and management support. The school faces considerable challenges that include a falling roll, a deficit budget largely due to the falling roll, and low morale amongst staff, students, and parents. School buildings are in a poor state and plans are in place to commence Building Schools for the Future works in 2011. The school is applying to become a National Challenge Trust School.

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

The school evaluates students' attainment as low and the quality of students' learning and progress as satisfactory. The downward trend in the GCSE results was reversed in 2009 with a 15% increase on the previous year in five A* to C GCSEs to 59%, and 9% increase on the previous year to 43% in five A* to C GCSEs (including English and mathematics). The school's results in five or more A* to G GCSEs rose to 96%. The impact of an assertive mentoring programme can be seen in the success rates of the Year 11 cohort. For instance, of the 94 students mentored, 69% of these achieved five A* to C GCSEs (including English and mathematics). Results in Key Stage 3, however, did not improve as Levels 5 and 6 results in all core subjects were below national averages. Following the success of the targeted interventions needed for the high proportions of students who were underachieving, the school is aware it needs to focus more systematically on planning teaching and learning strategies in the classroom. Managers have prioritised the need to consolidate the



good levels of attainment gained in Key Stage 4 and steer forward improvements in Key Stage 3.

In too many lessons, students are not making the progress they are capable of and are not attaining the standards they should in line with their potential. This is largely because teachers are not using the clear and accurate data they now have on students' prior attainment in planning appropriate learning activities. Expectations of students are low and the pace of teaching and staging of activities are often pitched inappropriately. Too little use is made of assessment activities that can inform teachers of the progress that individual students are making. These characteristics were evident in a significant proportion of lessons observed during the inspection, of which a fifth was deemed inadequate, with the majority as satisfactory. A small proportion of lessons were judged as good. In the good lessons observed, especially in English, students were more aware of what they needed to do to progress and improve their work. Assessment processes underpinned the planning of learning so that students were challenged and well supported and aspired to higher levels of attainment.

The school has strategies in place to disseminate this good practice to other areas in the curriculum. Through work scrutiny and discussion with pupils in lessons in history, business, science and English, a number of older students with well-below reading ages, displayed poor literacy skills. A promising start has been made to address this through the literacy programme in the Year 7 transition curriculum and this initiative needs now to be extended across the school.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that students' progress is effectively monitored using accurate information so that all students make at least the progress expected – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' attendance has increased steadily and is now just below national averages at 92%. Through the appointment of a full time education welfare officer and more rigorous follow up of absence by tutors, persistent absence has reduced from 12% to 7% since the last inspection. The current attendance policy emphasises the increased responsibility of tutors to meet with students individually during the morning tutorial time to follow up academic tracking and pastoral issues.

The recently created behaviour management policy is heavily weighted towards sanctions rather than rewards and, in the short term, this has led to a significant reduction in exclusions. The school's exclusions officer works successfully with students who are at risk of being excluded and facilitates the reintegration of excluded students. The onsite referral system for disruptive students is well organised and used extensively, with students spending one or two days working under supervision in an inclusion unit. Parents are notified and fully involved in the reintegration process.



Although low lying disruptive behaviour in lessons has decreased, where this continues to happen it is usually because students lack the problem-solving skills to work independently on the tasks set and they are over reliant on teachers to help them. As a result, some students get restless, when disengaged and insufficiently challenged. Staff affirm that all aspects of behaviour have much improved since the last inspection and that this has been a factor in improved student performance. However, behaviour around the school is boisterous at movement times and can create some safety issues and the tardy arrival of some students in lessons. There is, at present, no behaviour management strategy for corridor movement, especially at change of lesson and students interviewed expressed the need for greater staff presence at these times.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- devise, and implement consistently, attendance and behaviour management policies in order to improve attitudes to learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Since the last inspection, good systems have been put in place to bring about better teaching through targeting departments and individual teachers that require varying levels of support. However, lesson observations and scrutiny of students' work showed that the intended impact of these on students' learning and progress has yet to be seen. Although there is now greater consistency in the way planning for lessons is structured, too often, in practice, teaching does not meet the needs of all students in the class, in particular higher attaining students and those with poor literacy skills. In addition, support staff are not involved closely enough in the planning of in-class support and do not always work effectively with individuals and groups of students.

The school is aware that there are particular weaknesses in the curriculum. In information and communication technology, the school has tried unsuccessfully to develop teachers' capacity in improving the quality of teaching. The school is rightly piloting a new BTEC qualification that will be more suited to students' interests and abilities. In science, students are not encouraged to develop investigative skills and in mathematics, very little use is made of everyday contexts in enabling students to understand how to transfer their skills and knowledge to real-life situations. In many lessons observed, there was too much teacher talk, copying from the whiteboard and limited opportunities for students to engage in paired and group work.

The quality of feedback students receive in class is inconsistent. Some teachers offer clear explanations where students' answers to questions or written work demonstrate the need for further guidance, whilst others leave misunderstandings unchecked. Academic guidance lacks a solid and consistent foundation in the accurate assessment of students' learning across all subjects.

Progress on the areas for improvement:



- ensure that teaching meets the full range of individual needs in all lessons, so that all students are engaged, motivated and enabled to make good progress – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the departure of the previous headteacher, the new senior leadership team led by the executive headteacher has transformed the ethos of the school and has raised staff morale through revising existing policies, where appropriate. This has led to raised staff and student expectations and set the scene for further improvements to take place. The interim executive board has worked exceptionally well with the executive headteacher to prioritise the budget deficit with a recovery plan, establish good relations with parents and local communities, and ensure that the curriculum is fully staffed for this year. There has been urgency about the work since the last inspection and, as a result, the pace of improvement has been good in these areas. The senior school leadership team is now prioritising the capacity of middle leaders to have greater accountability, develop good self-evaluation skills and be able to identify challenging targets for their departments through a monitoring, self-evaluation and review policy. The executive headteacher has introduced more robust monitoring and evaluation procedures and internal reviews of all departments, starting with an internal review of modern foreign languages. Tracking of student achievement will be strengthened through observations of teachers and work scrutiny undertaken by heads of department as part of a revised assessment policy. In the last year, advanced skills teachers have supported and modelled teaching and learning working alongside staff.

Since the last inspection, satisfactory progress has been made on improving the rigour with which teaching and learning are monitored and these include 'spot check' observations. Whilst satisfactory quality assurance systems are now in place, these processes have not yet focused sufficiently on the quality of assessment that lie at the core of teaching and learning. In addition, there is currently no shared understanding in the school's team of quality assurers about the criteria used to judge learning and progress.

Staffing shortages in critical areas such as science and German have yet to be resolved. The school has a comprehensive school development plan that prioritises the requirement for high quality teaching and learning at all key stages. It makes clear the school's commitment to raising expectations through challenging targets in all subjects based on Fischer Family Trust data and two levels of progress per key stage. A five-year school improvement plan has linked school priorities to Building Schools for the Future. There is also a revised performance management policy now in place. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and evaluative and gives a fair description of the school's position at this point and the challenges it faces in the coming year. By the time of the next monitoring visit the school will need to demonstrate the impact of its actions in ensuring rapid improvement, critically, in the area of teaching and learning and students' progress.



Specialist school status

The school has specialist status in modern foreign languages. The GCSE results have been poor in the last year and well below national averages, in particular for German where the school was significantly below its Fischer Family Trust data targets. Students in most language lessons are not developing the necessary confidence and oral skills that they need for successful outcomes and most are not sufficiently challenged to attain the higher levels of which they are capable. The assistant headteacher in charge of the Language College, who was a linguist, left the school in July 2009 and this responsibility has been taken over by one of the new deputy headteachers who is overseeing the implementation of the new action plan and the specialist targets. The Language College has been an important part of the school ethos and a contributor to the local authority's plan for extending modern foreign languages in primary schools. This role can only continue through strengthening teaching and assessment and the development of strategies that emphasise active learning and student progress.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- involve managers, staff and students in clearly focused actions that address areas of identified weakness – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided satisfactory strategic and operational support and the statement of action meets requirements. Through the recent appointments of the interim executive board and the executive headteacher, the local authority has taken effective steps to strengthen the senior leadership team, although it is too early to fully evaluate their impact and capacity. The statement of action contains references to external support received from London Challenge advisers, the two local schools and the School Improvement Partner, but does not identify clearly measurable outcomes in terms of milestones, that would allow the local authority to rigorously monitor the progress and impact of its actions. There are currently gaps in the external support available to the school, for instance in modern foreign languages, and there is a need for sustained coherent in-class support in ICT, rather than a piecemeal advisory approach. Overall, there is a lack of clarity as to how the local authority intends greater coherence and synergy in the different forms of external support. This will be crucial in securing the rapid improvements needed to sustain capacity in the school's leadership team and its teachers by the next monitoring visit.

Priorities for further improvement

- To ensure that the local authority creates greater coherence and synergy in the different forms of external support for the school and monitors the school's leadership and teaching capacity more rigorously.



- To ensure that teachers and support staff plan learning activities to suit their students' capabilities and prior attainment and effectively assess students' understanding throughout the lesson.