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Ms Ann Dudgeon
The Acting Headteacher
The Coleshill School a Maths and Computing College
Coventry Road
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Dear Ms Dudgeon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of School

Following my visit with Lynne Blakelock and David Speakman, additional inspectors, to your school on 18 and 19 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in February 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to appropriate training and mentoring by the partner school.

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 Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families for Warwickshire.

Yours sincerely

Clive Kempton HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of The Coleshill School – a Maths and Computing College

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed 47 lessons, scrutinised development plans and local authority (LA) records of visit reports, met with the executive headteacher, acting headteacher, middle managers, seven groups of students, five parents, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last visit, the school has become part of the Gaining Ground Programme with Caludon Castle School in Coventry, and formally now named as its partner school. Caludon staff have enhanced the specific needs of Coleshill School in its developing stage. For example, assistance with data management, improving the quality of teaching and learning and target setting. Eleven staff have left the school for various reasons such as retirement, or career changes, and five have arrived: two substantive posts and three on secondment from the partner school. A newly qualified teacher is being well supported. There has been even stronger collaboration with Caludon Castle School since the last visit, and seven staff now teach on both sites or use their expertise for short periods of time. For example the deputy headteacher from Caludon supports some identified middle leaders two days a week and another member of staff is acting head of the sixth form for two days a week.

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

Since the last visit, outcomes at Key Stage 4 in the 2009 GCSE examinations illustrate that attainment has remained similar to 2008. Standards are still below national averages. However, students made better progress in English and mathematics taking account of their starting points when they entered the school. Post sixteen attainment was also below national averages with insufficient numbers of students gaining the higher grades. Attainment in applied courses, however, was better and in line with that found nationally. After a dip in numbers last year, more students decided to stay on in the sixth form this year due to the strengthened partnership arrangements with the partner school. Sixth form students are taught on both sites now with eleven courses taking place at Caludon Castle School. Realistic and challenging targets are now set for post-16 students. There is evidence that sixth form students are now making quicker progress, due to effective management, high staff expectations and improved student aspirations.

Strategies for identifying and supporting under-achieving Year 11 students are effective and well managed. School data suggests that the progress made by the current Year 11 is accelerating due to the more rigorous use of data and the identification of groups of students who would benefit from intervention support. The identified groups include underachieving boys; pupils who may narrowly miss achieving 5 or more A*-C grades; and a more able group predicted to get A and A* grades. Students value this support highly. Targets for GCSE results in summer 2010 predict a step change in attainment that will match the national average for the first time. By comparison, Year 10 are not making the same progress. Whilst underachieving students have been identified, intervention strategies are not yet in place due to less effective strategic management of provision in Year 10.

There has been a strong focus since the last visit on whole staff training focused on the use of learning objectives in lessons and in devising a policy for the marking of students' work. All staff have received training to understand and clarify what a learning objective is, and its key focus in every lesson. All lesson plans now have a learning objective. Students report that these objectives are now consistently used by all staff. They enjoy school more and know that they are learning something in each lesson as a result. One student summed up how the school had changed, 'This year there has been a change of attitude. There is now a can do rather than a can't do attitude'. Students were able to talk to inspectors about what they had learned in lessons. Whilst there is greater consistency in the understanding and use of learning objectives across the school, weaknesses remain in some teachers' plans where objectives are expressed more as broad aims. The 47 paired lesson observations conducted with senior staff confirm that student progress remains too variable across the school, and directly linked to the quality of teaching and the clarity of the learning objective.

Progress with improving standards since the last inspection – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour was reported to have improved at the last inspection and this remains the case. Students also agree that behaviour is better. There are still concerns in a minority of lessons, and this is directly linked to the quality of teaching, the different behaviour expectations of some staff and the learning challenge posed in lessons.

Attendance was below the national average at the time of the last inspection and has improved due to closer and more systematic monitoring. Figures since the start of the term indicate that attendance is now at the national average. The number of persistent absentees has reduced slightly since the same time last year, from 82 to 77. Robust strategies are now planned to support individual students and their families where barriers to good attendance have been identified.

Sixth form students have been given more responsibility across the school, such as leading younger student groups, and managing the student council.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of provision is still the largest area of concern for the school. Managers at all levels have worked hard, with the support of the partner school and the LA, to improve the quality of teaching and learning through whole-school in-service training and individual coaching support for identified staff. The quality of teaching has improved. At the last visit 28 per cent of lessons were judged good to better, compared with 40 per cent on this visit. There is now much more consistency in the way teachers plan their lessons and share the learning objectives with the students. In the more successful lessons, learning moves at a brisk pace and students are instantly engaged in stimulating learning activities that consolidate previous learning. Care is taken over the marking of work and there are high expectations of behaviour. However, there are still too many inadequate lessons where the learning objectives are still too vague and the pace of learning slow. There is a mismatch of the task planned to the students' ability. Here, students become restless and disengage; often chatting between themselves or causing low level disruption that affects the learning of others.

The extensive data in the school is now shared more with all staff. Effective training has ensured that they are now more aware of how they can identify the ability of any student they teach that should help them to plan appropriate work in each lesson. Some staff still do this a lot better than others. Assessment strategies are beginning to be used more in lessons, but there is still too much variability and uncertainty with some staff about how to use assessment in every lesson, for example through setting appropriately challenging work for different abilities, or the use of targeted diagnostic questioning to inform the next learning activity in the lesson. Plenaries at the end of lessons remain too rushed and unfocused and do not allow the teacher enough opportunity to check what students have learned to help them plan the next lesson.

Students report that they are now clear about their targets. Target grades are written in their books. The majority are also clear about what they need to do to improve. Good examples with clear structures were seen in history and French.

A consistent marking policy is now in place and used by the majority of staff. Two pieces of work as a minimum are required to be marked in detail each half term with a comment or grade about current attainment and suggestions focused on how subsequent work could be improved. Despite this clear policy advice to staff, the marking observed in the books during the inspection was variable, with good examples of marking in English. The marking remains poor in too many subjects. The rushed teacher handwriting is still hard to read for some students and comments do not always challenge students sufficiently to make progress in their

learning. There is little evidence in subsequent work that students are acting on the suggested points for improvement. The presentation of work in books is untidy in too many cases. Students do not show enough pride in their work. Any comments made by staff about presentation as part of their marking has little effect. These deficiencies are not spotted consistently enough by middle managers. The monitoring by subject leaders of lesson planning, the challenge posed in planned activities, marking, and presentation in books, remains an issue for the school.

Requirements for the safeguarding of students are robust.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure all teachers maximise the achievement, learning and progress of all pupils in lessons and consequently provide high quality written feedback when assessing pupils' work – inadequate.
- Ensure there is a consistency and coherence in the way assessment information is used throughout the school to set realistic but challenging targets – satisfactory.
- Monitor pupils' progress rigorously and systematically and make sure that individual pupils know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work in all subjects – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There has been some tangible progress and purposeful management activity since the last visit. The acting headteacher and executive headteacher have spearheaded meaningful action and have gained the respect of staff, students and their parents. One parent commented, 'There have been lots of positive improvements in the school'. They have worked well with external agencies and used the talents of staff in the school and partner school to drive improvement. As a result, staff morale has improved. The post-Ofsted action plan devised in collaboration with the local authority, has become a key driver for school improvement, shared with and understood by all teaching staff and managers. The plan has identified appropriate targets and actions for this term and each action point has been followed through with clear evaluations of its effectiveness, which inform the formulation of the plan for next term. For example, middle and senior leaders have been trained in how to make judgements on the quality of teaching and learning as observed in lessons. This training identified and supported individual managers who were finding it difficult to make accurate judgements when observing in their department. During the inspection middle managers reported that they have valued the training and the support they have received from senior staff to develop their management skills in this area. However, inconsistencies remain in the effectiveness of middle managers. Another example is how staff were trained in the marking of students books. Again, inconsistencies also remain in the implementation and monitoring of this marking policy. Overall, self-evaluation by senior managers is accurate and ensuing plans purposeful in affecting change. The key issue for leaders and managers at all levels

is ensuring consistency in the classroom as a result of whole school training. Improvement planning at subject level is variable and in many cases requires a sharper focus, as the whole school plan does, on short term, measurable outcomes.

Governors have received some valued training and are now much more aware of their roles. Data is more available to them now about student progress. They are holding the school to account and probing more about the progress the school is making.

Progress with the specialist school status remains slow with little tangible evidence to suggest it is having any real impact in the school or its community. Attainment did not improve dramatically in mathematics, although it was marginally better in information communication technology (ICT) in the 2009 GCSE results. The specialist subjects are still not driving whole school attainment enough. Specialist targets are still not being met and the leadership of the specialist status is weak.

The parent group established to meet with HMI each visit to monitor their views about the school's progress, is very positive about the how the school is improving and how they are kept in touch with developments. Their children appreciate the visible presence of the headteacher around the school and the use of fewer cover teachers in lessons. One parent summed up the progress made by the school as, 'getting there, but not there yet'.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the rigour and accuracy of self-evaluation and improvement planning at all levels of leadership - inadequate

External support

The executive headteacher and acting headteacher appointed by the local authority continue to provide outstanding support to the school. The new school improvement partner (SIP) has provided good support. Governors report that local authority governor training has been of good quality and has helped them to realise the significance of their roles in holding the school to account. The local authority has worked well with the school in devising a single post-Ofsted action plan and providing appropriate support from consultants to meet the identified focus for the term. However, support has not always been sufficiently targeted with an insistence on clear outcomes. The duration of the support has not always been enough for the needs of the school at specific points in their plan. There is currently insufficient evaluation of the impact of individual local authority staff by the school or the local authority themselves in the plan to be able to inform the next term of the school's recovery plan.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that learning activities in all lessons take account of student's capabilities.
- Develop the effectiveness of middle managers monitoring of their subjects, especially the consistency of lesson planning, the marking of books, regular work scrutiny including the presentation of work, and the use of data to monitor students' progress.