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Mr J Simon
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Simon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of NeneGate School

Following my visit to your school on 19–20 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

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 Peterborough.

Yours sincerely

George Derby

Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of NeneGate School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 19–20 November 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised policies and records and examined pupils' work. The inspector also met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, two groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since September 2009, a new deputy headteacher has been in post at the school and a new chairperson now leads the governing body. There are currently 32 pupils on the school's roll, although it has capacity for 55 pupils. Staff absence is high. At the time of this visit, a third of all the staff who work with pupils were absent from the school due to illness. As a result, Year 8 pupils were asked not to come into school on the first inspection day, as there was no one to teach them. They attended on the second day as this was an activity day, with the focus on raising money for charity. Year 11 pupils were taught offsite, at an alternative education provision, on the first day but were in school on the second day. More than half of the staff are not qualified teachers, although four additional appointments of qualified teachers have been made for January 2010.

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

The pupils made inadequate progress in the lessons observed during this inspection. This was because they were often not focused sufficiently on their work. Even when during periods when some pupils were applying themselves, inappropriate behaviour such as swearing and negative comments made by others, and, sometimes, verbal bullying, marred the learning. In most lessons, the pace of learning was too slow. Where satisfactory learning and progress did take place, it was often because what pupils were doing was practical and leading to awards. The attitudes to learning of the small number of Year 10 and 11 pupils observed and spoken with were reasonable. There was a growing realisation among pupils that it was important to work hard to attain qualifications which would help employment in the future. Year 11 pupils had already gained some Entry Level qualifications at the offsite centre last year and this has spurred them on.

Literacy levels remain low in the school and specific work to address weaknesses is still not yet properly in place. Slippage has occurred in relation to actions to address this in the school's improvement plan. Work has begun on assessing pupils' reading

ages and collating such information. There are now regular times when pupils read books during the week and a specialist literacy programme has been purchased for use in the near future.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that a literacy strategy is put in place across the school – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The attendance of pupils remains a serious concern and the school's approach to address this is inadequate. Attendance figures are far too low, particularly in Year 9. The school's own action plan fails to identify sufficient strategies to improve attendance or how targets will be achieved by particular milestones. A number of the pupils who were on part time programmes and/or taught at home during the last inspection are now being taught in school. Some still remain at home for part of the week as the school cannot manage their challenging behaviour effectively enough. The school is working with the local authority to seek alternative placements for such pupils but this is not a long-term solution as the school is registered to meet the needs of pupils with severe behaviour, emotional, and social difficulties. The school failed to meet its attendance target at the end of the last school year and attendance levels are far too low.

Pupils' behaviour is inadequate. The school's incentive scheme designed to help pupils improve their behaviour, is not used consistently, attention is not drawn to the consequences of pupils' actions, and pupils do not have specific, personal, behavioural targets which can be referred to. Pupils like receiving rewards each week but they do not receive feedback why they have been rewarded and the points earned in each lesson.

Swearing by pupils is prolific in many classes and is not adequately addressed. It is inconsistently challenged, giving the message to the pupils that it is acceptable. Where challenged, this has no impact. Although no incidents of violent behaviour were seen during the inspection, some pupils have been excluded for assaults on staff. The number of such exclusions has increased considerably since the last inspection, as a result of failures to manage the most challenging behaviour. It is clear that the staff do not have sufficient strategies to deal with the extremes of pupils' difficult behaviour. Although exclusion has reduced overall this term, the level of violence towards staff has increased markedly with more days lost because of this compared with the whole of last year. The school has introduced a 'seclusion' facility, where pupils work when their negative behaviour affects others. However, this is inconsistently used because of staff absence.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise levels of achievement by reducing the levels of absence and exclusions – inadequate.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was inadequate. This was mainly because pupils' challenging behaviour was not managed well enough. As a result, their behaviour interfered with the pace of the lesson, which in many cases was slow and affected other pupils' learning. Staff have few strategies to manage such situations. Pupils like 'hands-on', practical work, especially, carrying out experiments in science and using laptops during lessons in English and humanities. However, pupils say that activities of this nature are too few; often worksheets are provided or pupils complete exercises from books. Occasionally, pupils behave inappropriately when they are able to use laptops; they hide the screen from adults and make inappropriate remarks to others about what is on the screen.

Pupils are told what they are going to do in a lesson, but too frequently it is not clear what they will learn. There is a lack of different work for pupils in a class, despite the fact there is often a very small number, a very high ratio of adults to pupils and a wide variation in pupils' ability. Little account is taken of pupils' attainment levels and work is not accurately matched to their needs, especially as pupils often all do the same activity. There are some examples of good personal support given by teaching assistants. However, when the teacher tries to engage pupils learning, teaching assistants are frequently passive onlookers, with unclear roles.. Pupils have targets which are identified in their individual education plans, although they are unaware of them

The curriculum is largely prescribed with little choice and does not yet meet statutory requirements. Vocational, offsite, options are available for Year 11 pupils, although there is no such pathway for Year 10 pupils. The time for learning over the course of a week has increased to 25 hours. Religious education and French are now taught across all year groups. Examination courses in English, mathematics and science are now in place for Year 10 and 11. However in Key Stage 3, the resistant materials part of design and technology is not yet provided and music is not taught. Year 11 pupils do not receive their full entitlement as most of their learning takes place offsite. Citizenship is not taught and neither is science, both required subjects for Year 11 pupils. Staff believe that elements of citizenship are taught at the offsite centre but they do not have the detail about what is taught or learned. Vocational studies are enjoyed by the Year 11s and they know this will lead to a formal qualification to help them get employment. However, they have not received any careers education or Connexions advice this term to guide them in their future choices. Pupils have not undertaken any work experience thus far, nor is any work experience planned for the next two terms. This lack of careers guidance also applies to Years 9 and 10.

Work has begun to ensure that pupils' skills and National Curriculum levels are assessed and recorded and targets are set for raising attainment. A system is already in place to keep a track of their personal development. Account is taken, wherever possible, of pupils' previous assessments and predicted future levels. A system for collecting the information and identifying whether pupils are on track has been constructed, although there are some information gaps and in some cases assessment may not be entirely accurate. A process for agreeing the levels reached by pupils is not yet in place, either internally or with other schools. Plans in are in place to use a system to judged the school's performance in relation to other similar schools.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise achievement by ensuring that teaching always challenges students' learning – inadequate
- improve the curriculum by ensuring its meets pupils' needs, interests and abilities of all students and that all students receive the full number of recommended hours of teaching time – inadequate
- implement a system to assess and track student's progress and use this data to plan future learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has not moved forward sufficiently since its inspection in May. This is because the school's leadership has not identified with sufficient clarity or preciseness the actions it needs to pursue to ensure improvement and to keep fully to timescales, which help define what should be achieved. Leaders have not adjusted the plan or prioritised actions to address the problems the school currently faces. Staff absence has undoubtedly slowed the school's progress but the school's plan for improving provision does not dovetail closely enough with the local authority's plan and vice versa. The quality of teaching and learning has deteriorated since the last inspection due to a lack of monitoring. Performance management is not yet being undertaken. A behaviour reward system has not been sufficiently monitored to assess its impact and its application is ineffective. The deputy headteacher has not been able to undertake her responsibilities as she has taken a role in leading English, a subject in which she is not a specialist. Responsibilities for key improvement areas are not fairly shared among the school's leadership team and while other staff have been given subject leadership roles, there is no guidance or training in how they should carry these out.

The new chair of governors is very experienced and is aware that considerable work needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and provision is general. The governing body is under-strength with four vacancies but the chair is working hard to get other governors to share responsibility; an audit of their skills is being undertaken. It has been agreed by the local authority that the school's large

financial deficit can be reduced over a three year period. New, additional, qualified teachers have been appointed from January 2010 to increase teaching capacity. However, it is not clear how the school's long-term finances will be managed as there is no recovery plan as yet. The impact of the work of the governing body will be carefully assessed at the time of the next visit.

The school's procedures for safeguarding do not meet requirements. Not all the required information is listed on the school's single central record and a member of staff has been employed for 18 months without an enhanced Criminal Record Bureau check. The school's policy for safe recruitment does not state all the necessary checks to be carried out before a member of staff is appointed. In addition, the school has not been able to assure itself that the offsite provider where Year 11 pupils attend has all the necessary safeguards in place. Part of the school's plan shows that it was working with the local authority to ensure that all the required safeguarding measures, from September 2009, were in place for pupils working offsite with 'private', unregistered providers. However, a local authority review of this has not yet been undertaken. The last one, over a year ago, identified that the provider's staff were not trained in methods to manage and de-escalate behavioural situations, including in the use of restraint, and that they had not received child protection training. No current information about any improvement in these areas is available, yet pupils continue to attend the centre.

External support

The support provided by the local authority is inadequate. Despite a request from Ofsted to improve the local authority's action plan, this has not been done. The plan lacks precision, clear success criteria and does not link in closely enough with school actions. Actions identified have largely not been undertaken. For instance, the plan shows that a target for October 2009 was that teaching quality should be at least satisfactory or better and 50% good or better. Although some actions are identified they are not specific enough. Little of the support identified has been provided and that which is provided, has not had a specific focus on improving teaching. No monitoring and evaluation of teaching has taken place.

The headteacher is being helped by a headteacher of a successful school, although a greater level of personal support is required to build capacity. Consultants have advised staff, particularly in the development of English and there has been help provided in some other areas such as science. However, notes of visit lack sufficient evaluation of impact, a clarity of the next steps to be undertaken and timelines / expectations are not always clear. There has been no School Improvement Partner support since January 2009. No educational psychology assistance has been provided this term, despite an influx of pupils with severe, challenging behaviour, which the school has clearly struggled with.

The local authority monitoring group's reports list activities and actions that have taken place. Although these are largely descriptive, there is some evaluation. However, it is not clear from the minutes, the progress that has been made in relation to the areas for improvement and the further actions required.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching and learning, and the progress that pupils make, by ensuring that
 - staff address pupil's disruptive behaviour in a consistent way and that pupils are made aware of the consequences of their actions
 - that staff consistently apply the school's incentive system
 - pupils take responsibility for their own behaviour through giving them regular feedback about how they are responding in lessons, and especially in relation to areas where they need to individually improve.
- Ensure that plans for improvement by the local authority and the school
 - have clear, specific actions which are sufficiently detailed, relate to the priorities for improvement and have clear and realistic success criteria
 - are rigorously monitored and evaluated in relation to the success or otherwise of actions and impact of the support provided.
- Significantly increase the support provided by the local authority to the school.
- Ensure all aspects of the safeguarding of pupils meet requirements.