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Mr James Simon
Headteacher
Nene Gate
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Peterborough
Cambridgeshire
PE1 5GZ

Dear Mr Simon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of NeneGate

Following my visit to your school on 17 and 18 March 2010, 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 May 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 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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Special measures: monitoring of NeneGate School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. A group of Year 10 students were spoken with, and discussions were held with the chair of governors, four representatives from the local authority and the school's consultant. Brief conversations also took place with members of the school's staff, the community policeman and attendance officer.

Context

A member of staff on long-term sick leave has now resigned and three new teachers have been appointed, all with qualified teacher status. A teacher was engaged to teach design and technology but only stayed a very short while. Year 11 pupils were not present during the visit, as most were attending work experience. Although the school is registered for 55 students, there are only 34 on roll, of which six are on part-time placement or home tuition.

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

Students' progress in lessons was mainly satisfactory. They applied themselves adequately to most of their work. Students present in Years 9 and 10 concentrated and remained on task well. The motivation of the students seen on this visit was much improved because teachers presented work in a way that interested and involved them more in learning and because activities were often practical. Students felt good about their successes because the work was presented in small achievable steps. Although more challenging for most students, for a few it was too easy, because it was not always well matched to their needs and abilities. Occasionally, students were confused over what they were learning because what they were asked to do was not made clear or the key ideas not sufficiently reinforced. They were also, occasionally, given too much support, instead of being helped to work independently. Staff do not always understand the learning requirements of students with additional needs, such as dyspraxia or autism. As a result, methods and approaches used can be inappropriate and slow these students' progress.

Many of the older students are more inspired to work harder because they now understand that working towards awards prepares them well the future. Some creditable results have been attained by students in Years 10 and 11 in their recent GCSE module tests in mathematics.



Most students, particularly those who have difficulties, with reading and writing, are now being better supported, through guided reading activities and the school's 'accelerated reading' programme. For some students this has led to good improvement in their ability to read and understand text. However, the promotion of literacy skills in lessons across the curriculum still shows some inconsistency.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Other relevant student outcomes

Despite the more positive attitudes of students in many lessons, and the school's efforts in targeting poor attenders, attendance remains stubbornly low. This is particularly the case in Years 9 and 10. Improved access to college courses has been successful in improving the attendance of Year 11 students. However, a few students in Year 11 have extremely low attendance. A small number of full time students still only attend on a part-time basis, because of concerns over their challenging behaviour.

Students' behaviour in most lessons was satisfactory; in some it was good. Nearly all are committed to the school's reward system and are keen to get their points. There is clearly an improvement in students' understanding of what they must do to demonstrate good behaviour, although some still find it difficult to comply. Swearing is much reduced, although some is tolerated by staff. Because of improvements in staff's skills in behaviour management and the better application of the reward system, the number of external exclusions has lessened. However, there has been an increase in internal exclusion, in the school's seclusion room. This is now consistently staffed and much work goes into helping students calm down and reflect on their behaviour. However, the purpose of the activities which take place in the seclusion room is not entirely clear. Some teaching and learning occurs but there are few records and little reference to the impact on students' behaviour.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching and learning in most lessons seen was satisfactory. However, the school's target of 50% of good or better teaching in lessons for the end of the summer term is ambitious and remains a long way out of reach. Lessons are better planned and consistently follow a common format. This ensures that key aspects, such as the



objectives and success criteria for learning are considered before the lesson begins. Although more account is taken of students' levels of attainment, staff are still focused on evaluating what students have completed in a lesson. In discussion, they are now much clearer about the learning to be achieved which underpins the work undertaken. However, students are not sufficiently involved in evaluating their learning or behaviour. In addition, staff sometimes miss opportunities to remind students of their targets. In many lessons teaching assistants are supportive and some confidently take the lead in activities, such as 'Sensory Circuits'. In others, they sometimes lack the knowledge to be able to help students.

The work on assessment and the tracking of students' progress is improving satisfactorily. The school's consultant has supported the staffs' understanding of the processes well. The work of the local authority in helping staff assess and agree the level of students' work, is leading to more accurate assessment. The school has not yet decided what constitutes satisfactory, good or better progress. However, staff are now beginning to use data more effectively to set levels for students to achieve. They also have a better understanding that information about students' starting points is crucial in measuring students' progress.

There have been big improvements in the design of the curriculum for Key Stage 4, which now better meets the students' needs. In Years 10 and 11, students attend local college and undertake a range of vocational work, although records of what they have learned there are mainly descriptive and the school cannot fully account for their progress. The National Curriculum is now properly in place for these students, with citizenship and science fully taught. Award bearing courses at Entry Level and GCSE are also in place, as well as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Certificate of Personal Effectiveness. Students also receive careers advice and a full programme of work experience is on offer. Music, using a technological approach, is taught in Key Stage 3, but resistant materials technology is not taught due to the lack of properly qualified staff.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise achievement by ensuring that teaching always challenges students' learning—satisfactory
- improve the curriculum by ensuring it meets students' 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

Overall, the school's revised action plan is suitable and fit for purpose. Occasionally, timelines are too open-ended and do not have a finish date. The local authority plan and the school's plan now link well together.



A key focus for the school since the previous inspection visit, has been improving the quality of teaching. Regular, paired observations by the headteacher, together with the local authority's school improvement advisers, have helped ensure that important features needed to improve learning are established in lessons. However, not all aspects are fully in place. Nevertheless, the determination to get things right, and to tackle inadequate teaching, are seen in the positive actions taken to set teaching targets and monitor performance very closely. The senior leadership team has a better balance of responsibilities; the deputy headteacher now has the time to undertake her role and has a clear view of the part she is to play in improving the school's work. However, senior staff do not have the opportunity to monitor teaching, which the school recognises as an important next step for improvement. Since the last visit, concerns by some staff have come to light. Perceptions about the improvements made thus far are mixed and there is some evidence of a lack of cohesion among the senior team, especially when key decisions are to be communicated. Local authority personnel have been robust in the way they have investigated the aspects of staff complaints which they have been responsible for. The headteacher's survey of the school's 'culture' is to be followed up by a series of appropriate actions, in order to better pinpoint and address any emerging issues.

The school has also asked the students to complete questionnaires about their views of the school. Feedback from most students is considerably negative, especially about their enjoyment of school. However, questions in this survey are not always precisely framed. In discussion, the students in Year 10 were positive about Nene Gate, its redesigned Key Stage 4 curriculum and about how they were guided and supported in their future aspirations. However, they were critical that some staff did not understand their specific needs, especially with regard to autism and dyspraxia.

The chair of governors monitors the performance of the school closely, is knowledgeable about where it needs to improve and challenges its leaders well. Additional governors have been recruited. However, much of the work to move the school forward is undertaken by just a few governors. A financial recovery plan, in order to reduce the school's considerable deficit, is now being formulated.

The safeguarding concerns raised at the last visit have been addressed. The single central record contains the required information and the procedures for safe recruitment follow the DCSF guidance. The local authority and school are now able to ensure themselves that offsite providers meet safeguarding requirements.

External support

The local authority, through its revised action plan, has provided a good range of support, since the last visit. For instance, several visits from a mentor headteacher has helped build the capacity of Nene Gate's headteacher in particular, and has guided the school with regard to the development of its assessment systems. A wide range of professional advisers from the local authority has been well targeted in



relation to the issues and the support the school has needed, such as for literacy, attendance and the improving the students' behaviour. Key leaders within the local authority work closely with the headteacher and chair of governors. They closely monitor the progress the school is making and their regular reports now identify well the impact of the various interventions.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure a close match of work to students' individual needs and abilities, especially where students have specific special educational needs.
- Improve communication throughout the school and the cohesiveness of the senior leadership team, thus promoting a better school climate.
- Provide clarity and purpose over the use of the seclusion room and ensure the school can identify the impact of such provision.

