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1 July 2010

Mr Mark Phillips
The Headteacher
Elliott School
Pullman Gardens
London
SW15 3DG

Dear Mr Phillips

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Elliott School

Following my visit with Helen Griffiths and Michael Saunders, additional inspectors, to your school on 16 and 17 June 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 third 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.

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 third monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2010

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the school's work through observing lessons, a review of documents and pupils' work, and met with the headteacher, senior and middle managers, groups of students, and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

The new substantive headteacher had been in post for six weeks at the time of this visit. He has appointed a new head of department for modern foreign languages and a new assistant head to lead mathematics; the latter is due to take up his post in September 2010. Although the school has experienced staff changes in its middle leadership team, the situation is much more stabilised since the last visit. The school continues to face considerable challenges that include a falling roll and a constrained budget, largely due to the falling roll, in relation to the staffing profile. The budget deficit has now significantly reduced since the last visit and progress in controlling the school's 'in year' overspend has been made.

Since the arrival of the new headteacher, morale amongst staff and students is now much improved.

The interim executive board continues in its support of the school and, in addition, there is a partnership that meets regularly, comprised of representatives from the local authority, London Challenge advisers, and other sources of external support from Graveney and Chestnut Grove schools. A new governing body is planned to support the school from September 2010.

The school's plans to achieve trust status as a National Challenge Trust school with Ernest Bevan and Chestnut Grove Schools are due to be finalised in the autumn. The former interim headteacher is to be appointed as chief executive of the trust. The Building Schools for the Future plans are intended to create a good learning environment for students. This is seen by the school as essential for raising standards.

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

Significant changes in staffing and the subsequent lack of stability have had the greatest impact on Year 11 students. They are not predicted to meet the challenging targets set for them, in five A* to C GCSEs including mathematics and English. The students are, however, projected to attain the Family Fisher Trust D targets, or slightly exceed these, and to attain just below national averages for five A* to C GCSEs, including mathematics and English. The school's data project a more optimistic picture for current Year 10 students' targets based on three levels of



progress. These students are on track to exceed their targets in five A* to C GCSEs and on track to attain their targets in five A* to C GCSEs (with English and mathematics). Whole-school level data for students between Years 7 to 9 do not, as yet, present a wholly accurate picture of their progress as it is not measured in sub-levels against their targets. The school is working to ensure that this will be in place from September 2010 so that progress for all students is even more effectively monitored by managers and teachers.

The school continues to have a strong focus on targeted interventions for students who are underachieving. At the last visit, monitoring of students at the additional subject revision sessions revealed a low turn out. Subsequently, the school wrote to parents and carers emphasising the mandatory nature of these sessions and, as a result, a greater number of Year 11 students started attending these.

In the majority of lessons observed by inspectors in science and English, students were making satisfactory and sometimes good progress and enjoying their learning. On this visit, in those lessons where inspectors observed students making good or even in a minority of cases outstanding progress, teachers were constantly checking their progress and reframing activities in line with this. Students were able to articulate to inspectors their enjoyment in learning and the skills and knowledge they had acquired during the lesson and over time.

Progress since the last visit on the area 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 is at national averages at 93%. Since the last visit the new headteacher has introduced a behaviour management policy that requires much more rigorous and systematic follow up of absence and behaviour by tutors and heads of year. Although tutors have a responsibility to meet with students individually during the morning tutorial time to follow up academic tracking and pastoral issues, this not yet consistently happening across all year groups. The headteacher is currently reviewing the role of these tutorial sessions, and the structure of the school day for September, so as to improve further on behaviour and attendance. The school has worked hard on establishing classroom and corridor monitoring systems and inspectors observed better punctuality, with the vast majority of students arriving in lessons on time.

Low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons has now significantly decreased since the last visit. However, inspectors observed on those few occasions where this now happens, it is usually because teachers do not plan activities and tasks that sufficiently engage students. This results in students losing interest and becoming restless. In general all aspects of behaviour have much improved, in most subjects.



Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of provision

Since the last visit, the new headteacher has reviewed the monitoring and support systems that focus on teaching and learning to ensure they have greater impact across all subjects. This is now being further developed. In particular, a review of learning support staff will be taking place to optimise their role in the classroom. Inspectors observed that they are still not involved closely enough in the planning of in-class support and do not always work effectively with individuals and groups of students.

All lessons observed by inspectors on this visit demonstrated clear lesson planning with learning objectives and evidenced a much greater awareness by teachers of their students' abilities and needs. However, although teachers now know their students much better, learning activities and tasks are still not consistently planned across all subjects with the students' individual or group needs in mind and there is still too much variability. This was especially the case in design and technology, modern foreign languages and mathematics. In these lessons, the pace of teaching and the tasks and activities were often pitched inappropriately to students' levels and teachers did not sufficiently check the extent of learning taking place. Not all students were attaining standards in line with their potential. A minority of more able students were not sufficiently challenged and less able students, or those with specific language and literacy needs, not given structured support by the teacher or learning support assistant to complete tasks independently. The school is fully aware of the areas of particular weaknesses in the curriculum. In too many lessons observed, there was much copying of information from the whiteboard by students and limited opportunities for many to engage in paired and group work.

In mathematics, some of the weaknesses observed at the last two visits continue, as insufficient use was made of everyday contexts in enabling students to understand how to transfer their skills and knowledge to real-life situations. Nevertheless, on this occasion, inspectors did observe some good and outstanding teaching in mathematics, where students clearly understood mathematical concepts and enjoyed applying their skills within different contexts. The weaknesses identified at the last visit in modern foreign language lessons still continue. Given the gaps in students' language skills, especially their oral skills, teachers are still not setting tasks and activities that help them develop basic communicative competencies. Too many students in these lessons lack confidence in using the target language. Many have not yet acquired the problem-solving skills they need to work independently on the tasks set.



In English, teachers' assessment procedures are now firmly embedded and lead to accurate assessments of pupils' progress against levelled criteria. However, across most subjects, with a few exceptions, too little use is made of assessment activities that can inform teachers of the progress that individual students are making. Teachers make very little use of assessment activities to check students' learning before moving on to the next activity or input. These characteristics were evident in a significant proportion of lessons observed during the inspection. A greater proportion of lessons were judged as good or outstanding than at the previous monitoring visit and a smaller proportion were judged as inadequate. In the good lessons observed, especially in English and history, students were more engaged in their learning and aware of what they needed to do to progress and improve their work and clear assessment processes underpinned the planning of learning so that students were challenged and well supported.

Although this good practice is now beginning in mathematics and science, the school has not yet disseminated this systematically to other areas in the curriculum. Assessment for learning across subjects and within subjects is still too inconsistent. Marking of students' books shows promising signs of teachers giving constructive feedback to students on how to improve. The school now needs to ensure that this is more consistent across all subjects and that students are given opportunities to act on their teachers' guidance and to learn from their corrections. All students appear to know their targets, but not all know what they need to do to reach their targets in individual subjects.

The school is committed to tackling the well-below average reading ages of older students who display poor literacy skills and staff have been trained on cross-curricular literacy approaches since the last visit. Managers are developing a whole-school approach to the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar for all written assignments. This is still at an early stage. Following the last visit, glossaries are increasingly being used with students across subjects and this is helping them develop independent skills.

Progress on the area 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 – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new headteacher is highly adept and since his arrival has systematically addressed continuing weaknesses in the school. He has achieved this through a detailed action plan, building further capacity in his senior and middle leaders and improving the quality of teaching through a general review of staffing and the performance management of poor teaching. In a very short space of time he has



successfully consolidated improvements started by his predecessor and he is now steering forward on a review of the curriculum and staffing in relation to making further efficiency savings. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has now been remodelled to be more in line to serve students' needs.

Staff and students reported to inspectors that they were impressed by the headteacher's strong leadership qualities and the effectiveness of his actions. Middle leaders now report that they value the greater accountability and self-evaluation skills they are acquiring. They believe this will enable them to work closely with their department staff to identify challenging performance targets for their subjects. Following on from the last visit, there is much closer and more effective working between department heads, through the teaming of science with mathematics and English with modern foreign languages, and this is leading to building greater capacity for improvement amongst middle leaders. Lesson observations are taking place through greater inter-departmental support, but systematic peer observations are not yet in place. Lesson observations are now planned to focus much more on learning and progress of students using a new format and criteria. Where inspectors observed inadequate teaching, the school was aware of it and taking clear action to resolve the problem and now has implemented rigorous procedures for addressing the underperformance of teachers.

The headteacher's self-evaluation of the progress the school has made to date is accurate and is a fair reflection of the school's position at this point and the challenges it faces over the next few months. The school has prioritised strengthening middle leadership, capacity for sustained improvement and teaching expertise in the weaker areas.

Specialist school status

Owing to staffing shortages and weaknesses in provision, the school's specialist status in modern foreign languages has not been well developed since the last visit. The deputy headteacher, who has responsibility for this area, has provided good support and challenge for staff. The new head of languages has worked hard to establish appropriate schemes of work and accreditation that would help students consolidate their learning and develop language skills at a faster pace.

Although some good teaching was observed on this visit, the department still lacks sustained capacity in good languages teaching and assessment expertise. Since the last monitoring visit, the head of department has written a scheme of work for developing students' oral skills and is now working closely with a local school and the Central Institute for Languages Teaching to develop the good practice that is still critically needed in the classroom.

The language college is still an important contributor to the local authority's plan for extending modern foreign languages in primary schools and this aspect of the provision continues to develop well.



The school, having recognised the fundamental weaknesses in the department, has rightly taken a strategic view that in the best interests of the students, the priority should be to establish good teaching and learning and is therefore, reviewing its specialist status. This has, in fact, clearly focused all staff and managers in the right direction.

Progress on the area for improvement:

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

External support

The local authority continues to provide good strategic and operational support since the last visit and is facilitating the setting up of the trust status to enable the school to have greater support. The statement of action in relation to its impact continues to be monitored effectively by the school's headteacher and the local authority adviser.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve learning and progress across all subjects through:
 - ensuring that teachers and support staff consistently plan learning activities to suit their students' capabilities and prior attainment.
- Continue to improve the consistency of assessment and academic guidance through:
 - providing an effective range of activities that assess students' understanding throughout the lesson and inform the next stages of learning
 - ensuring that all students know how to improve their literacy skills
 - ensuring that students act on constructive guidance from teachers on how to improve their work and minimise gaps in their skills and knowledge
 - ensuring that all students know precisely what they need to do to improve on their targets.
- Identify the growing expertise in teaching and assessment practice that exists in some areas of the school and disseminate this good practice systematically to others.