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2 July 2010

Mr James Simon
Headteacher
Nene Gate
Park Lane
Peterborough
Cambridgeshire
PE1 5GZ

Dear Mr Simon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Nene Gate

Following my visit to your school on 1 July 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 May 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

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



Special measures: monitoring of Nene Gate School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 1 July 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Discussions were held with the Chair of Governors and a representative from the local authority. Brief conversations also took place with members of the school's staff and students.

Context

New students are now being admitted to the school and it is anticipated the school's roll will increase over the next school year. Two teachers are due to leave the school at the end of term and will be replaced by three qualified teachers. One will be in design and technology, a subject area which the school has found hard to fill over the past 12 months. Year 11 students have left the school; all except one have specific destinations in relation to college courses or work. At the time of this visit there were just 24 students on roll. Seven are still on part-time placement and some of these have refused to engage with the school and accept courses or tuition offered.

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

Students made satisfactory progress in lessons and occasionally it was good. Planning has improved so that students' learning builds better on what they have been taught previously. This is because their work is more effectively planned in small steps and students gain a much greater sense of achievement when they accurately complete the tasks set. Students' concentration and application to their work have improved and are satisfactory. Many enjoyed their lessons and made a positive contribution, especially when work was practical. Where they were less engaged, sometimes because the topic did not grab their interest, or where some deliberately tried to undermine the teacher's efforts, staff generally gave great encouragement to help them focus on their work and dealt with any minor behaviour difficulties swiftly and effectively. Most work was reasonably challenging and students enjoyed the challenge, although it is still not always well matched to the most able students' skills and abilities and, consequently, does not stretch them far enough.

Students' reading skills are improving because of the increased attention to this in tutor time and through the accelerated reading programme. Students are becoming more confident to tackle texts, read aloud, and especially some of the older students



to write short stories. Staff are more vigilant in making links to literacy and numeracy across the curriculum and there is a sound focus on helping students understand key words. However, there are missed opportunities to support them in their spelling of these.

Although the six Year 11 students have left the school, their previous work and assessments show that four are on track for grades D to G with higher grades in English and the lower grades in science. The four students have also already achieved Entry Level 3 in science. Passes are also predicted in City and Guilds courses in a small number of vocational subjects which students undertook at local college. The school has worked hard over the past 12 months to ensure that these students are on the right courses and tailored to students' need, following some unsuccessful previous experiences.

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

Students' behaviour was mostly satisfactory in lessons and around the school. In some lessons, such as in Y8 science lesson on forces, they were engrossed in their practical work. There are much greater opportunities for collaborative working between students and examples of students sensitively supporting each other. Although some minor behavioural incidents occurred on the day of the visit, they were dealt with effectively. Most staff are better equipped to deal with students' difficult behaviour and a good range of strategies was observed during the inspection. Students are keen to receive their points for good behaviour and get regular feedback about how they are meeting the school's expectations. However, some staff are still inconsistent in their approach and give points out too generously. Swearing has reduced significantly, although there are still some instances where this is not effectively tackled. External exclusion is also much reduced compared to the school's previous figures, although it is still too frequently used. The school is in the process of providing a clearer and graduated approach to dealing with incidents and internal exclusion, although this is too new to evaluate its impact fully. Students are better informed about why a specific course of action is taken. The school keeps detailed records of incidents but it does not have a system to track improvements in students' behaviour and personal development. Its points system is paper-based and is not able to be analysed easily for trends and patterns.

The school still has too high a number of students who do not attend school on a full time basis and this affects the school's attendance figures which are stubbornly low. It also means that these students' academic achievements remain limited. Excluding these students, attendance is 86% which is a slight improvement, although still well below the average for secondary schools. Individual profiles of attendance show that



most who are on the roll as full time students actually attend for approximately 90% of the time which shows a good improvement for these students. Despite the tenacity of the school in finding alternative programmes and providers for the part-time students / poor attenders, and the local authority services supporting the school and taking in some cases legal action, some students and families do not comply and some do not at attend the school at all. A great deal of effort has been put in yet the impact is disappointingly limited. Some students have been removed off roll but there remain some who will not engage with the wide variety of alternative programmes offered.

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 were at least satisfactory and occasionally good on this visit. It is clear that the support provided by the local authority is paying off in the way that most staff are making effective use of what they have learned from training and support. Students are made clear about what they are to learn and different tasks are set for students according to their needs and abilities. However, the improved plans do not specifically state which students are to achieve certain targets because many use the general terms of, 'all, most and some' for these, yet there are only a small number of students in each class. In the best practice, the outcomes for individual students are specified and the criteria by which success can be judged is stated.

The pace of lessons has clearly improved and students are more engaged as a result. The use of a good range of methods, and account taken of the ways students best learn, means that work is better tailored for the majority. There is an improved focus on learning by teaching staff, although assistants are more concerned with the completion of work and some do not have the knowledge or skills to help students in some of the more practical / technical lessons. On occasion, some assistants do little to support students in lessons.

The support provided on improving assessment is paying dividends and staff are much more aware of the levels students are working at and any additional special educational needs they have. Staff use a greater range of ways of finding out whether students have learned what was intended and some good examples were seen in mathematics. There are still missed opportunities to promote students' self-assessment and for them to be reminded of their targets. A more sophisticated system of tracking progress is in place with targets for improvement based on an individual analysis of students' previous progress and a level of appropriate challenge included.



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 – this was not fully evaluated on this visit, although some students still do not receive full-time education
- implement a system to assess and track students' progress and use this data to plan future learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The support provided to the leadership team is clearly building capacity and a greater working partnership now evident. The headteacher has grown in confidence and knowledge and is collecting and utilising a wider range of data to demonstrate progress. Difficult issues are not avoided and a clarity of purpose with regard to improvement is apparent. Tenacity to get things right is a key feature of the headteacher's leadership, although the impact of recent interventions such as to improve attendance, is not always borne out in positive outcomes. Decisive action has been taken to deal with teaching where it has not been satisfactory and improvement has not occurred, despite considerable support. Staff morale is high, despite impending changes to staffing and a greater cohesiveness and understanding about what leaders are trying to achieve.

The action plan is a useful guide to the next steps to be achieved and the work undertaken with the local authority has helped to determine what the features of good teaching should be adopted in the school and observed in lessons. Observations have been mainly carried out by the headteacher and evaluations accord when joint observations are undertaken. However, other senior leaders are not yet fully involved in the evaluation teaching and learning. Rigorous interview procedures have been put in place to ensure that quality teachers are appointed; the very experienced Chair of Governors has been fully involved, also in observing candidates teaching. The Chair has encouraged other governors to take a more active role and this is now beginning to occur with visits to the school. However, it is still the Chair who is mainly providing the challenge to the school. Financial support from the local authority has enabled governors to produce a three-year financial recovery plan to eliminate the school's deficit.

The school's procedures for safeguarding are adequate and the single central record contains the required information; the procedures for safe recruitment follow the Department for Education guidance.

External support



The local authority has been relentless in its pursuit of improvement. 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. Although not all of its inputs are yet bearing fruit in all areas, it is clear that the good range of training and personal guidance provided to staff is being incorporated in teaching and planning. For instance, the support for science has led to close working links with other schools, improved knowledge about teaching specific aspects and curriculum design and an increase in resources. Capacity has been built within the leadership team and decisive action to improve the ethos and culture of the school and build a qualified team of teachers. 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

- Improve further the match of work to students' individual needs by personalising planning to show what each individual student will achieve and the criteria by which success will be judged.
- Ensure that the school's forthcoming programme of training and support for teaching assistants helps to improve their subject knowledge, especially in practical subjects such as information and communication technology and design and technology, and provides them with a better understanding about how students' learning can be supported.
- Continue to work closely with the local authority to resolve some of the long standing issues of the students who only attend the school on a part-time basis.

