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11 March 2011

Mrs Hasler
Weston Favell School
Booth Lane South
Northampton
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Dear Mrs Hasler

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Weston Favell School

Following my visit to your school on 9 and 10 March 2011, with additional inspectors Kevin Harrison and Emma Aylesbury, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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.

The school can appoint up to four newly qualified teachers, although none can be appointed in English, mathematics or science.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2009.

- Immediately put in place an accurate and complete centralised staffing register that complies with statutory safeguarding requirements.
- By September 2010, raise students' attainment and achievement, especially in English and mathematics, by:
 - improving teaching so that the large majority is good or better and none is inadequate
 - using assessment information to ensure higher expectations in lessons and good challenge for all students
 - improving the accuracy with which pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified and their needs addressed
 - using assessment information and better marking to ensure that all students are aware of how they can improve.
- By January 2011, improve attendance so that it reaches the national average.
- Improve the effectiveness of governance, leadership and management, by:
 - strengthening the ways in which the governing body works with the local authority to provide effective governance for the school
 - developing a stable leadership team that works effectively without extensive external support
 - improving the consistency and quality of middle leaders' effectiveness by embedding the systems recently developed.

Special measures: monitoring of Weston Favell School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 9–10 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of students, staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, a representative from the local authority, the National Challenge Adviser.

Context

Since the last monitoring, the school has received approval to become an academy from September 2011. The sponsor academy will be the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust. An additional assistant headteacher with responsibility for special educational needs took up post very recently. A new appointment has also been made to enhance leadership of the school's specialism. In addition a new head of the Art/Design Technology faculty has been appointed.

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

Students are making better progress as a result of the more effective use of assessment in many lessons. Students were observed to be making good progress in most of the mathematics lessons observed. Improvements seen in the progress students make in English, science, music and humanities lessons were more modest. There continue to be subjects in which students consistently demonstrate that they can make good and sometimes outstanding progress. The school's increasingly reliable assessment data suggest more students will reach their targets than has been the case in the past. However, there continue to be lessons in which students make inadequate progress.

The school has done well in identifying particular groups that make less progress and is taking appropriate action to correct this. For instance, additional activities have improved the outcomes for those students who are in receipt of free school meals. The 2010 results in the sixth form were better and confirm that students made good progress last year in this key stage.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement.

- By September 2010, raise students' attainment and achievement, especially in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Improvements in behaviour are being maintained. Poor behaviour is almost exclusively associated with teaching that is barely satisfactory or inadequate. Punctuality to lessons is an issue in certain areas of the school, particularly after lunchtime. The school's systems to monitor attendance are becoming embedded and, as a result, overall attendance has increased. Persistent absences have reduced as a result of effective intervention by tutors and leaders at all levels. Students indicate that they can influence decision making in the school. For instance, Year 11 students reported that they felt involved in helping decide who should be the academy's sponsor.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement.

- By January 2011, improve attendance so that it reaches the national average – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

The use of assessment has noticeably improved since the last visit. The school has taken steps to ensure greater accuracy in teacher assessments. Increasingly, this is allowing the school to use assessment as a further way of checking the effectiveness of teaching over time. Interventions are far better targeted than has been the case in the recent past. Teaching is most effective where questions are strongly influenced by teachers' assessment of students' learning and where all students are made to think about their responses. Students are quite often required to indicate how confident they feel about their learning and, in the better lessons, they are actively involved in identifying the next steps in learning. Teachers refer much more frequently to National Curriculum levels in lessons so students are more aware of their targets and what they must do to reach them. There are times when all undertake the same activities and students do not think sufficiently deeply. For instance, opportunities are missed to encourage students to apply their learning and to critically evaluate a range of responses. Also students do not have sufficient opportunity to make choices so that they can focus on the work they find most challenging.

Although marking has improved, there is too much inconsistency in approaches so that it is not always as effective as it might be. The best examples actively involved students in stating precisely the steps they need to take to reach the next level. However, examples were also seen of students not having responded to the comments made by teachers. Teaching assistants were observed to be giving more focused support in lessons. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are being more effectively supported by the more varied and better coordinated provision. For instance, students who cannot access the main curriculum due to their social and emotional needs receive well-targeted support to enable them quickly to be included in lessons.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership and management continue to improve. The Interim Executive Board is highly influential in the school's development and provides valuable support to the headteacher. The process of securing an academy sponsor has been well managed so there is wide support for this development. In the short term, the headteacher is successfully developing leadership at a range of levels so that the school is less reliant on one person. This is most apparent at assistant headteacher level, where these colleagues are growing in confidence as they bring about improvement. For instance, the progress made in improving the use of assessment is a direct result of effective leadership by those in the teaching and learning team. The plans to improve the curriculum point to growing strengths in this area. Assistant headteachers are taking much more responsibility for evaluating progress and are contributing to the school's perceptive self-evaluation. Timely plans are being developed to involve middle leaders more in the determining the future direction of the school.

The school's technology status is beginning to have some impact. Improvement is evident in mathematics, although less so in the other subjects associated with the specialism. However, a new appointment has been made which offers the prospect of better leadership of this aspect. The school continues to have an accurate single central record that complies with statutory requirements for safeguarding.

Despite these growing strengths, there are weaknesses in leadership. Heads of English, mathematics and science do not receive sufficient support from their seconds in department. The hard work of the deputy headteacher is not having sufficient impact on the leadership of the school. There has been limited progress improving staffing, therefore the proportion of teaching that is inadequate remains too high.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Improve the effectiveness of governance, leadership and management – satisfactory.
- Immediately put in place an accurate and complete centralised staffing register that complies with statutory requirements – satisfactory.

External support

The quality and impact of the support provided by those external to the school continues to be good. The local authority has worked well with the Interim Executive Board to develop plans aimed at securing longer term support through an academy sponsor. The school's National Challenge adviser has made a valuable contribution to the professional development of assistant headteachers by organising good practice visits and through support on curriculum planning. Local authority support for mathematics and attendance has contributed to improvements in these areas.