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8 December 2011

Mr Robert Preston
Executive Headteacher
The Misbourne School
Misbourne Drive
Great Missenden
Buckinghamshire
HP16 0BN

Dear Mr Preston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Misbourne School

Following my visit with Christopher Russell Her Majesty's Inspector, Helen Griffiths and Victor Chaffey, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 6 and 7 December 2011, 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 September 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement, which were identified during that inspection, is 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 – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed after consulting the lead inspector.

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 Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2011

- Raise attainment, particularly in the core subjects of English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment information to plan carefully for the needs of all learners
 - planning and implementing effective strategies for students who have fallen behind in their learning
 - ensuring that all staff have the highest expectations of what students can achieve.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels have a clear and shared understanding of how to take the school forward by:
 - clarifying everyone's roles and responsibilities
 - making self-evaluation procedures more rigorous
 - evaluating the impact of initiatives on different groups of students.

Special measures: monitoring of The Misbourne School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 December 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and other staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, three groups of students, a few parents/carers and a representative from the local authority. There was also a telephone interview with the headteacher from the partnership school.

Context

Very few changes have taken place since the previous monitoring inspection in June 2011. New and experienced staff were appointed to replace those who left in July. The school staff currently reflect the diverse school intake. The school roll is currently stable, but there was a slight decline in the number of Year 7 students entering the school in September.

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

Standards of attainment in the GCSE examinations in June 2011 were better than the previous year and were the school's best results over the last four years. Students' attainment was similar to the national averages in the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C including English and mathematics and most made the expected progress by this measure. When the overall progress of students is taken into consideration, it was similar to 2010. Most students from different groups did not make the expected progress in all subjects based on their starting points; in particular, too few higher ability students did not gain the highest grades in mathematics. Most of the few students from minority ethnic backgrounds, on average, made better progress.

The 2012 GCSE targets for five A* to C in all subjects and five A* to C including English and mathematics have been raised and reflect the rising trend in performance. Although the school missed the 2011 targets, current predictions and tracking data indicate that students are now making better progress. In the sixth form, there was a significant improvement in the 2011 A-level results, with Year 13 students making good progress, notably in art and design and photography, the specialist subjects.

The school has very good tracking systems in place, and uses these to ensure that all students have equal access to provision, as the progress of different groups of students is tracked rigorously and regularly. A good range of intervention support strategies are used well for students at risk of underachieving.

Progress since the last monitoring visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment, particularly in the core subject of English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The vast majority of students work diligently in lessons and are keen to do well. Students' positive attitudes to their school and learning are seen in their good, and increasingly exemplary, behaviour. During the monitoring visit, when the fire alarm was raised, students' exemplary behaviour illustrated their ingrained and mature approach for self and others. Relationships between staff and students are a strength of the school. Harmonious relationships between students of different cultural heritages support their moral, social and cultural development; in particular, they expressed very few concerns about bullying or racist behaviour. Students say they feel safe in their school and are confident that any form of discriminatory behaviour is not tolerated and will be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

The school works hard to promote good attendance. Systems to encourage parents to support regular attendance are well established and effective. For example, holidays during term time are forcefully discouraged; clear prompts are used to involve staff at different levels of seniority if attendance is declining, and monthly multi-agency meetings and the reward systems have been good deterrents. As a result, since the start of September, attendance has improved; it is rising and is currently high for secondary schools.

Students have opportunities to evaluate and provide feedback on the quality of provision and to use their voice through the re-established school council. Sixth form students act as good role models, mentoring Years 10 and 11 students.

The effectiveness of provision

Following the previous monitoring visit, the school has built on its extensive programme of monitoring and evaluation so that it is better informed about the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. Its evaluation is precise and accurate. Intervention work, including mentoring, coaching, regular feedback, tailored training and the sharing of good practice, has increased the proportion of good or better teaching. Evaluative reviews show that the school has done much to raise the profile of teaching and is making positive strides in improving the performance of teachers. As a result, there is a steady increase in the percentage of well-taught lessons. Expectations of common classroom routines are established and used well in the majority of lessons. Nevertheless, variability remains within a few departments and across the curriculum. The school recognises that there is still more to do in relation to targeting support where it is needed most.

Where there is outstanding and good teaching, planning is very well structured with the aim of ensuring that students can make good or better progress. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of the work by using a good range of questions. They provide opportunities for students to reflect on the work and give insightful comments; talk and a range of collaborative work are used well to accelerate progress and consolidate skills and concepts. Furthermore, assessment criteria underpin every aspect of the lesson enabling students to know what they need to do to improve their target. However, these practices are not consistently used in every curriculum area and a minority of teaching remains satisfactory or barely satisfactory. In the satisfactory lessons, although students are well behaved and compliant, teachers do not consistently show the level of sharpness that senior leaders expect when applying the established lesson routines. This compromises the acceleration of students' progress. In these lessons, there is a lack of excitement; planning is at times sketchy and work is not well matched to needs; assessment information including peer and self-assessment is not used well. Additionally, there is not enough clarity when information is given; teachers talk for too long and so do not give students enough opportunity to talk about their work; questioning skills are still developing and, above all, there is not enough challenge to stretch students.

The quality of marking is improving and departments make good use of the school's marking policy. However, not all departments use the marking system consistently to ensure that students give a response that identifies their understanding of the next steps in their learning.

The curriculum meets the needs of students and provision has improved. Provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is much improved as steps have been taken to map out and meet their needs. Higher ability students say they are suitably challenged in lessons, although a few students from different ability groups have expressed the need for more challenging work. The school works hard to ensure that the proportion of students who are not in employment, education or training is very low.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school is well led. The headteacher has taken decisive action to consolidate the changes introduced since taking up the appointment in June 2011. The impact of his work is best reflected in the confidence that parents, carers, students and staff have expressed in his leadership of the school that is experiencing rapid change and moving forward. The school's decline has been confined to the past, as staff increasingly accept and fulfil the daily mantra, 'What have you done to improve standards today?'

A number of key factors are contributing to the school's success in driving improvement. First, there is a strong commitment to school improvement. There is a

no-nonsense approach; tough messages are given and actions taken, as necessary. The headteacher is highly respected and his unassuming, but firm, leadership skills have been used successfully to command the support of virtually all staff because the strategic plan and vision have been explained very clearly. There is accountability and shared ownership of changes as staff are consulted. Second, an increasingly strong and confident group of senior leaders surround the headteacher; their leadership skills are developing well under his direction. He has strategically re-structured the staff and strengthened the leadership team by providing opportunities for experienced and aspiring middle leaders to join it for one school year. Roles and responsibilities have been clearly defined and all staff have a job description tailored to their work. All members of the senior team share the role of leading and managing the school. Third, accountability is well established and permeates from the interim executive board through the senior team and to all members of staff. Fourth, monitoring and evaluation of work are regular features of the school's work and no member of staff is exempt from this duty. All provision, including a range of strategies to improve outcomes and the curriculum, is kept under scrutiny through internal and external reviews by the partner school and the local authority's work. The school is well placed to respond quickly to slippages because evaluations of action plans are carried out every two weeks. For example, a sound start has been made to improving the shortcomings in provision for the increasing number of students learning English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school appreciates that there is more to do but, at this stage, training for all staff and key personnel is in place.

Although good progress has been made to developing and establishing roles and systems, the senior leaders are not complacent. However, a few experienced curriculum leaders are not taking lead responsibilities assiduously to further school improvement. Their action plans and evaluation of work are not rigorous or helpful in guiding staff requiring support or holding them to account. The senior leaders have recognised the need to concentrate on the weaker teaching, which is not fully reflecting the school's policy on improvement. Consequently, some staff have not yet had the full benefit of receiving concerted support to improve their teaching quickly.

The school's specialist arts status is having a positive impact on provision. Students achieve well in the specialist subjects, the department is strong and well led. The specialist status is used to develop a range of community ventures and specialist curricular activities. For example, staff use their expertise to support whole-school developmental work to raise student aspirations and improve teaching.

The interim executive board, which is well led by its committed chair, has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It includes a body of experts that drives improvement. This is helped by regular visits and involvement in reviews, the accurate and helpful reports provided by the headteacher and the oral and written representations from curriculum leaders. Sound plans are being developed to retain the interim headteacher in order to

sustain stability and improvement. The interim executive board fulfils its statutory duties well and safeguarding requirements are met. At this stage, the school's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

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

- ensure that leaders and managers at all levels have a clear and shared understanding of how to take the school forward – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide the school with much good support. In particular, it has contributed well to the much-improved provision for students with special educational needs and those who are learning English as an additional language. The brokered support from the outstanding partner school is making a valuable contribution to curriculum area reviews by helping the school to have a good grasp of targeting support and developing provision. The new monitoring officer provides helpful professional advice and support. At this stage, the local authority has been able to decrease some of the support provided, partly as the school culture in relation to improving outcomes is changing quickly; therefore, consideration has been given to its exit strategy for support.