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25 November 2008

Mr P O'Brien
Headteacher
Bexleyheath School
Woolwich Road
Bexleyheath
DA7 4HU

Dear Mr O'Brien

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bexleyheath School

Following my visit with Peter Dacombe and Mick Saunders, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 18 and 19 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

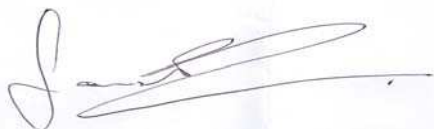
Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Bexley.

Yours sincerely



Samantha Morgan-Price
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Bexleyheath School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Headteacher, the extended leadership team, groups of students, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Appointments to posts at senior leadership level are now completed. The school is currently in the initial stages of securing a permanent Headteacher to replace the current executive Headteacher. The governing body anticipate that an appointment will be made before the end of December 2008.

Achievement and standards

In 2007/08 students' achievement was below expectations. Although students in Year 9 reached their targets, Year 11 students did not. The school analyses progress in some detail, and is now in a better position to identify where intervention should be targeted. However, the impact of this work was not seen in 2008, when standards and achievement at Key Stage 4 showed a declining picture and were clearly inadequate. The evidence for this year's students is more positive. Tracking shows that students are likely to reach their target grades for A*–C at GCSE in many subjects. It is a different picture in mathematics, however, where it appears that many students are unlikely to achieve in line with their potential. Students significantly underachieved in science in 2008 and it is unclear whether all students will achieve their targets this year. In lessons inspectors noted improved teaching in a number of subjects, leading to better progress. However, that impact is yet to be reflected in public examination success. Achievement in 2008 in the sixth form was uneven across subjects, but satisfactory overall.

Personal development and well-being

In the large majority of lessons students behave well, listen to teachers and get on sensibly with their work. In a small proportion of lessons, progress is impeded by poor behaviour, which is usually related to shortcomings in the quality of teaching. Behaviour in corridors and around the school is generally satisfactory, although inspectors saw some examples of boisterous behaviour from a small minority of students. Nevertheless, students who were interviewed were firmly of the opinion that behaviour has improved this term compared to the previous academic year. They also pointed to improvements in relationships between different groups of students, saying that the racial divisions which had previously been an issue were no longer apparent. They felt that the school was now a more harmonious place.

Students' attendance for the academic year 2007/08 was significantly below the national average. Figures for the current term show some improvement compared to the same time last year. Within these figures, the proportion of unauthorised absence remains too high, especially in Year 10 where it is over 5%.

Quality of provision

The positive features seen in the last visit have been built upon, so that the proportion of good teaching has increased. Students comment that more lessons are now purposeful, varied and stimulating, and they feel better informed about their progress and targets. Nevertheless, the quality of marking and written feedback is uneven, as is the use of assessment in lessons to support and challenge students, and this is acknowledged to be an area for development. The school has developed good systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, and now has a secure view of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors found a substantial proportion of lessons to be good or better. These had clear and well-understood objectives and were conducted at a brisk pace, with a variety of activities which motivated and encouraged students' involvement and promoted their independence. The school recognises that there remains a stubborn proportion of inadequate lessons where teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of students. These lessons leave learners uninvolved and bored and unsure of what they are supposed to be learning.

The planned changes to the curriculum have been fully implemented. Taken as a whole, these changes are wide ranging, have already demonstrated some positive impact and have good potential for the future. Provision for literacy and numeracy support is now in place, with a significant amount of extra time devoted to this for about 100 students in Years 7 and 8. The extra literacy classes are well resourced, with teaching assistants providing focused support to groups of students. Early indications suggest that the programme is well adapted to students' needs. However, the first scheduled assessment of students' progress against appropriate benchmarks has yet to take place, so there are no hard data available. Inspection evidence shows that literacy across the curriculum now has a higher profile, with, for example, more consistent use of key words in many subjects.

Across the school in Years 7 to 10, the rigid streaming system has been abandoned in favour of mixed-ability groupings in some subjects and setting in the core subjects across each quarter of the school population. One group of students said that they had initially been concerned about these plans, but now felt that it was working and they could see some of the advantages.

Further work has been done to improve the pathways available to students at Key Stage 4. In Year 9 there was a wider range of options to choose from, especially in terms of vocational courses, together with a much better option system, giving more information and allowing students greater choice. This has resulted in students following a more appropriate range of courses and is reflected in much lower numbers of students requesting a change of course

after starting. The school recognises that there is more to be done to expand further the range of choices within some of the pathways, especially in terms of alternatives to GCSE. There is also a recognition that guidance processes would benefit from further development.

In addition, a number of other important changes have been made to improve provision. For example, information and communication technology (ICT) is now taught to all students as a separate subject in Years 7 to 10. A combined citizenship and personal, health, social and citizenship education (PHSCE) course, taught by a team of specialists, is now in place for all students in Years 7 to 10.

The changes which have been made have been carried out with a clear rationale, and with some thoughtful and detailed forward planning. It is, however, still too early to make a full evaluation of the impact of the changes.

A number of additional measures have been put in place since September to improve punctuality and attendance. There is evidence of positive impact in terms of improved punctuality in the morning. While there is also some evidence of improvement in the overall attendance figures, the proportion of unauthorised attendance remains well above average. Although the importance of good attendance is stressed through assemblies and by tutors and heads of years, the actual data for each class were not prominently displayed so that students could see both the school's target and the progress of each class towards them.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

Bring the underperforming subjects up to the level of the best by focusing more strongly on teaching and learning in the classroom
– satisfactory

Ensure curriculum initiatives are carefully planned, monitored and reviewed
– good

Leadership and management

Management actions since the last monitoring visit have effectively brought about improvements in the leadership of the curriculum and teaching and learning. Although the proportion of good or better lessons has improved, the proportion of inadequate lessons remains unchanged. The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate and has enabled staff to share the school's vision and key priorities.

The extended leadership team is now in place. These new leaders are aware of the need to move quickly to address the continued underachievement of students. There are now clear lines of reporting throughout the school which has enabled better scrutiny and accountability of subject performance. Detailed subject reviews now allow heads of departments to plan for

improvement more effectively. Improved availability of management information on students' performance has resulted in more precise monitoring. Managers now have a more accurate view of how well the school is doing.

Student achievement targets for 2008/09 are more challenging, enabling the school to narrow the attainment gap at both key stages. Targets at Key Stage 3 in all three core subjects are in line with current students' performance. The department of English is on track to achieve its Key Stage 4 targets. However, it is unclear whether targets for mathematics and science will be achieved. Management actions to address student underperformance in both subjects have not been swift enough.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

Develop strong leadership teams to drive improvements at all levels – satisfactory

External support

The support provided by the local authority continues to have a positive impact on key areas of the school's work. In conjunction with consultants funded by the London Challenge, the local authority is working effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning in science and mathematics.

Priorities for further improvement

Improve the quality of assessment of learning; diagnostic marking and feedback to ensure students know how to improve.

Accelerate the achievement of students in mathematics and science by improving the effectiveness of leadership and management within these subjects.