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Mrs Meena Gabbi
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Dear Mrs Gabbi

Special measures monitoring inspection of Montsaye Academy

Following my visit with Matthew Sammy, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 11 and 12 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the school improvement board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016.

- Rapidly increase the effectiveness of the leadership and management of teaching by ensuring that:
 - senior and middle leaders quickly and successfully tackle the weaknesses in teaching that they have identified
 - teachers implement, consistently, the school’s policies with regard to teaching, learning and assessment and the management of pupils’ behaviour
 - teachers are held fully to account for the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - the link between the pay increases awarded to teachers and the achievement of their examination classes is strengthened
 - the training provided for teachers has a clear and demonstrable impact in improving the quality of teaching across the school and, consequently, outcomes for pupils
 - the monitoring of the curriculum is sufficiently strong to ensure that the new arrangements for mixed-ability teaching meet the needs of the most and least able pupils consistently well
 - strategies to improve the quality of pupils’ spelling, punctuation and grammar across the curriculum are embedded quickly and consistently
 - the quality of pupils’ presentation of their work improves in the lessons where it is weak.
- Ensure that the funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils is used to raise their achievement rapidly.
- Urgently raise achievement in key stage 4, particularly in mathematics, science and humanities, by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently make effective use of assessment to plan learning which meets the needs of different groups of pupils, including pupils of all abilities
 - ensuring that teachers implement the school’s marking and feedback policy consistently so that pupils have a secure understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work
 - tackling weaker aspects of teaching quickly so that pupils receive the consistently good teaching that they need to catch up
 - equipping middle leaders with the skills necessary to bring about the improvements needed in their subject departments more quickly.

- Improve outcomes for students in Year 12, particularly boys.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of pupils' behaviour by ensuring that teachers implement the school's behaviour policy consistently and that incidents of low-level disruptive behaviour are eradicated.
- Increase the effectiveness of the governance of the school by ensuring that members of the local governing body and trustees have sufficient oversight of the school's performance and hold leaders to account effectively.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 September 2018

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and a group of other teaching staff. They also met with members of the school improvement board and members of the trust board. Inspectors met with a group of pupils and spoke with others informally around school and in their lessons during the course of the two days. Inspectors visited 26 lessons, many with a senior leader, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and learning observed. They also visited three tutor sessions and observed an assembly. They looked at a sample of pupils' work, across a range of subjects and year groups, and looked at pupils' work in their lessons. Inspectors considered a variety of documents, including improvement plans, information about pupils' progress and attainment, records relating to attendance and behaviour, and information about safeguarding arrangements. They also read minutes of meetings of the school improvement board and external reviews of different aspects of the school's work. Inspectors read a range of school policies and information published on the school website.

Context

There have been further changes in the school's leadership since the last monitoring visit. One of the assistant vice-principals left the school in August 2018. A new head of English and a new assistant head of English joined the school in July 2018. New heads of the geography and IT departments also joined the school in September 2018. In addition, a member of the humanities faculty has been appointed as head of this faculty.

A number of other teaching staff left the school at the end of the summer term in 2018. These staff have all been replaced and the school is currently fully staffed.

The school is part of the Montsaye Community Learning Partnership (MCLP). Following the inspection in November 2016, the trust dissolved the governing body and formed a school improvement board (SIB), which remains in place. Governance is provided by the SIB and the MCLP.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has maintained extremely high expectations of staff and pupils. She is uncompromising in her aspiration for pupils' success in all that they do. Her clear vision is understood by all, and they are keen to achieve her ambition. The headteacher is very well supported by a highly effective senior vice-principal. He has added considerable capacity to the leadership team since his appointment in January 2018. Other senior leaders have developed in confidence and expertise further and continue to become increasingly effective in their roles. The product is a

cohesive, collaborative leadership team which drives improvements in all aspects of the school's work.

Plans for improvement are clear and precise. They focus on the school's key priorities. Leaders regularly review the impact of their work and amend their plans accordingly. Leaders recognise the improvements that have been made and are realistic about where further improvements are necessary. Leaders have refined their monitoring and evaluation systems. These now focus on the impact on pupils' outcomes. Monitoring activities identify the actions that are necessary to address weaknesses, and subsequent monitoring activities focus on the impact of these actions.

Leaders have, rightly, prioritised improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. A new team to lead improvements to this aspect of the school's work was created in September 2018, headed by the senior vice-principal and involving middle leaders. This team has already begun to build on the improvements evident at the last monitoring visit. The coaching programme, recently introduced at the time of the last monitoring visit is now well established. Individual staff's development needs are identified, and support is provided to help them to improve their practice. Staff value this professional development, alongside opportunities to share best practice, and say that it helps them to improve. Leaders know staff's strengths and weaknesses well. They are aware that some weaker teaching practice remains and are taking action to challenge staff where necessary.

Senior leaders have increased their expectations of middle leaders, who have risen to the challenge. Senior leaders are supporting middle leaders to be more effective in their role through a programme of training events. The programme focuses on specific aspects of leadership, such as monitoring activities, and enables middle leaders to take greater responsibility for leading improvements to the quality of teaching in their departments. Middle leaders feel more knowledgeable and empowered to support their staff and to hold them to account.

The changes that the headteacher made to the staff appraisal system are beginning to bear fruit. Staff are now set challenging targets which focus on the school's key priorities of improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to raise standards for pupils. The increased rigour has contributed to raised expectations and improved performance throughout the school.

The special educational needs coordinator has continued to bring about improvements to the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. She has provided training and guidance to all staff to ensure that they have the skills and the information that they require to meet the needs of individual pupils. She monitors the provision, for example by visiting pupils in their lessons, and challenges staff when needed. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities feel supported in school and their outcomes are improving.

The head of sixth form has developed her skills and expertise. She now monitors the quality of teaching in the sixth form closely and liaises with heads of department to support staff to improve their practice. She meets with students and parents to ensure that they are well supported. The proportion of students who have continued with their studies into Year 13 has increased considerably this year. Nevertheless, it remains below the national average. Leaders are taking action to reduce the number of students who leave at the end of Year 12 by ensuring that they enrol in appropriate courses when they start. The last monitoring visit noted the improvements to the quality of guidance that younger pupils received in preparation to join the sixth form. This has continued and the head of sixth form has developed plans to improve this further. For example, she is introducing opportunities for pupils to observe lessons in the sixth form before they apply for sixth-form courses themselves. Students are well prepared for life beyond the sixth form. The proportion of students who move on to education, employment and training continues to rise and is likely to be above the national average this year.

The SIB continues to provide challenge and support, holding leaders and other staff to account effectively. Members of the SIB are extremely knowledgeable and well trained. They regularly review the school's progress and have an up-to-date understanding of developments in all aspects of the school. The SIB is highly effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved further, but there are still some inconsistencies and examples of weaker practice. During the last monitoring visit, inspectors noted that the framework to help teachers to plan to meet the needs of different abilities was used by all teachers. However, not all teachers were using the framework effectively. Although improvements are evident, this remains the case. Teachers consistently plan different activities according to the framework of 'cautious', 'confident', 'challenge' and 'challenge plus', but there is still some confusion about how to do this well. Therefore, there are still examples of teachers who plan different activities that do not provide different levels of challenge. Leaders have identified staff who require further support and continue to act to tackle this issue.

Many teachers plan activities which interest and enthuse pupils. For example, pupils in a Year 8 geography lesson were observed using modelling clay to exemplify the processes of the water cycle. Pupils recognised how this activity helped them to develop their understanding.

Leaders introduced a new assessment and feedback policy in July 2017. At the time of the last monitoring visit, inspectors noted that it had been effective in ensuring that teachers were checking pupils' work and their progress more regularly than in the past. However, not all teachers were checking pupils' work closely enough to ensure that they were provided with the timely intervention that they needed to

catch up. Leaders have further amended this policy to provide greater clarity of expectations of staff and pupils. The amended policy now incorporates the literacy policy, which was previously inconsistently applied. Although the new policy was only implemented in September 2018, work in pupils' books indicates that it is understood by staff, who are beginning to apply it. It is too early to make any further evaluation of its impact.

Improving pupils' literacy skills has remained a key priority. The successful DEAR (drop everything and read) project has continued and plans are in place to further develop the school's work in this area. English teachers are currently assessing pupils to set them literacy targets. These will be used by all staff, across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The Montsaye ERA (excellence, resilience, aspiration) values are now embedded and permeate through different aspects of the school. For example, they are used to underpin the message delivered in assemblies and as a focus for reflection in morning tutor period activities. Pupils recognise and understand these values, which are used to promote pupils' personal development and welfare. ERA days explore pertinent issues such as mental health and raising aspirations. Diversity and equality are also promoted through these values, which complement the personal, health and social education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils understand diversity and accept those who are different to themselves. However, pupils say that there are still many instances of homophobic language. Such language use does not reflect pupils' attitudes. Nevertheless, leaders are aware of the need to ensure that pupils do not use homophobic language as part of their daily vocabulary.

Pupils' conduct in lessons and around school is good. They are polite and courteous. For example, older pupils were observed helping new Year 7 pupils to find their way about the school. Teachers apply the behaviour policy more consistently than in the past, although pupils say that some inconsistencies remain. Pupils are proud to be members of the school. They recognise the improvements that have been made and that staff hold their interests at heart. Pupils have responded well to raised expectations of uniform, which they wear with pride. They have also responded positively to teachers' expectations of well-presented work.

All staff are now expected to take responsibility for improving pupils' attendance. For example, progress leaders hold tutors to account for their tutor group's attendance. Leaders have worked with individual pupils and families to help them to understand the importance of regular attendance. Leaders identify barriers to attending and provide support where needed. They also take action to challenge poor attendance more quickly and more effectively than in the past. Nevertheless, whole-school attendance, although improving, remains below the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is considerably lower than average. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities also do not attend regularly enough. The

proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is considerably higher than the national average. Leaders and members of the SIB are aware of the need to urgently improve attendance for all pupils, and particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Outcomes for pupils

In recent years, pupils have made slower progress than that seen nationally, and their attainment has also been below national averages. Improvements to the quality of teaching are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress, including that of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Information provided by the school indicates that in 2018, pupils' progress improved, although it was still slower than that of other pupils nationally. Leaders' tracking information indicates that current pupils are starting to make faster progress, particularly in the younger year groups.

Disadvantaged pupils' attainment is considerably lower than that of other pupils nationally. Increasing the rates of progress for this group of pupils remains a priority.

In 2018, attainment in the sixth form improved. However, students' progress is likely to be below the national average. Leaders' predictions that boys would make increased progress were not realised and boys' progress was considerably below expectations. Improving outcomes for boys in the sixth form remains a priority.

External support

The MCLP continues to provide valuable and effective support. Leaders and staff are extremely positive about the support that they receive, for example a trust-wide training day held in September 2018. The trust has commissioned a variety of external reviews that have supported leaders in improving specific aspects of the school. For example, external reviews have been conducted around the use of the school's pupil premium funding and the effectiveness of the modern foreign languages department. The trust supports leaders to evaluate the impact of their actions as recommended by these external reviews.