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Colin Boxall
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Dear Mr Boxall

Special measures monitoring inspection of Montsaye Academy

Following my visit with John Craig, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 July 2017, 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 us during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2016.

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.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I recommend that the school does not seek to 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 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 first monitoring inspection on 5 July 2017 to 6 July 2017

Evidence

Inspectors met with the interim headteacher and other senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of other staff. They also met with members of the school improvement board and a representative of the trust. Inspectors spoke with pupils formally and informally at breaktime and lunchtime. They observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes, at lunchtimes and between lessons.

Inspectors visited 20 lessons, some jointly with leaders, across different subjects and year groups. During these visits, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke with them to evaluate the quality of their learning. They also examined the work in a sample of pupils' books. Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documents in relation to behaviour and attendance, safeguarding, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' attainment and progress, and staff performance. Plans for improvement were evaluated. Inspectors considered the 90 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and also the views of parents gathered by a survey conducted by the school. Inspectors assessed the impact of leaders' actions taken since the last inspection, with particular focus on the areas for improvement relating to leadership and management, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been considerable changes to the governance and leadership of the school. The school is part of the Montsaye Community Learning Partnership (MCLP). Following the inspection, the trust immediately dissolved the governing body and formed a school improvement board (SIB). The previous principal left the school and was replaced by an interim headteacher in January 2017. A permanent principal has been appointed for September 2017.

In addition, nine teaching staff have left the school and 16 have joined. A further 12 staff are due to leave at the end of August 2017. Nine staff have been appointed for September 2017, including a middle leader in the humanities department. The school will be fully staffed in September 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher has taken decisive and effective action to address the fundamental and underlying issues that were previously preventing school improvement. He has shared high expectations of staff and pupils, focusing on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and ensuring that all understand and recognise their responsibilities in improving the quality of education provided by the school.

The interim headteacher has reallocated areas of responsibility within the senior leadership team. There is now greater clarity over roles and responsibilities. Middle leaders and class teachers are also clearer about expectations. There is a clear sense of collaboration and a collective drive for improvement. Staff are fully supportive of senior leaders in realising their aims of pupils' success.

Senior leaders have rightly concentrated on improving teaching throughout the school. They have ensured that staff understand what is expected of them and how they can improve their practice through coaching and support. For example, they have introduced the means to film teachers and then subsequently discuss strengths and weaknesses that they identify. Teachers are extremely positive about this practice and say that it has helped them to understand what they need to do to improve the quality of their teaching.

Leaders have introduced a more robust strategy to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school. Following lesson observations and other monitoring activities, such as scrutiny of pupils' work, senior leaders work with heads of department and teachers to identify their strengths and development needs. This information is then used to inform staff training. Regular review and evaluation help staff to understand how to improve their practice. Staff are positive about this work and recognise that it is helping them to improve.

There is much emphasis on supporting teachers to improve, but the interim headteacher has also ensured that staff who do not demonstrate this capacity are formally challenged.

The interim headteacher has ensured that middle leaders are held to greater account for improving the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. Following assessment points, middle leaders meet with senior leaders to account for pupils' progress, including focusing on disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Following these raising standards leader (RSL) meetings, middle leaders then work with individual teachers to identify necessary actions to further support pupils' progress. As a result of this more rigorous monitoring, staff have a greater understanding of their responsibility for pupils' progress. This, alongside improvements to teaching, is beginning to improve the quality of education provided at the school. However, this work has not yet had a significant impact on pupils' outcomes and leaders are aware of the need to maintain high levels of accountability in order to bring about the necessary improvements.

The leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities requires significant improvement. Leaders are in the process of appointing a temporary special educational needs coordinator and plan to make a permanent appointment for January 2018.

The last inspection identified the need to improve the consistency with which teachers were applying the school's marking and feedback policy. Leaders identified the need to increase the regularity and frequency with which teachers monitor pupils' work. They took the decision to simplify the policy which has had the desired effect to increase the degree of teachers' monitoring. However, the policy does not provide clarity of expectations. As a result, the quality of feedback is inconsistent and the impact on pupils' progress is extremely variable.

Currently, there is no whole-school assessment policy. Leaders are aware that this is urgently required to secure the necessary improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

A key area in need of significant improvement, identified at the last inspection, was the use of pupil premium funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Although work in other areas of the school is improving provision for disadvantaged pupils alongside all pupils, action taken in this area of the school's work has not been swift enough. Allocation of the significant amount of additional funding is unclear, nor has there been demonstrable impact. However, as part of the reallocation of leadership responsibilities, in April 2017, one of the assistant vice-principals took responsibility for the pupil premium strategy. He has a clear vision and high expectations of pupils' potential. Leaders are aware that addressing this vital area of the school's work is a key priority.

The interim headteacher identified the need to empower teachers to take greater responsibility for managing pupils' behaviour. He took the decision to remove the 're-start room', a facility, staffed by senior leaders, to enable teachers to remove disruptive pupils from lessons. Now, middle leaders take responsibility for the initial dealing of disruptive pupils, seeking support from senior leaders only when necessary. In addition, the interim headteacher has helped staff to understand how they can better support pupils' behaviour. They now know how to meet pupils' learning needs in order to avoid off-task and disruptive behaviour. Leaders introduced a new behaviour and rewards policy in March 2017 to further support improvements in this area.

In the past, performance management has not been effectively used to raise standards in pupils' outcomes. The interim headteacher has taken action to ensure that the next cycle of performance management will include a focus on pupils' progress. Teachers are aware and support this expectation. The trust board and the school improvement board are clear about the need for greater rigour in this aspect of the school's work.

Following staffing changes, the responsibility for developing and improving literacy across the curriculum is shared among the English team and overseen by one of the vice-principals. Leaders have introduced 'DEAR' (drop everything and read), which runs on a rolling programme for 20 minutes each day. Inspectors observed all pupils, including sixth-form students, engrossed in private reading during the

allocated period. The majority of staff, including non-teaching staff, were also seen to be participating. Leaders also plan to introduce a new reading programme in September 2017 which will facilitate the selection of ability-appropriate texts. Staff have been trained and resources have been purchased and organised to support the effective implementation of this programme.

There is an expectation that all departments support the development of pupils' literacy skills, for example via the marking and feedback policy, and, indeed, all departments have embraced the DEAR approach. However, the emphasis is on the English department to take responsibility for improvements. There is a lack of clarity of whole-school expectations to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar across the curriculum. As a result, strategies are not embedded or consistently applied throughout the school.

The sixth-form leader has taken greater responsibility for the monitoring of provision for students in Years 12 and 13, responding to the findings of the previous inspection. She conducts monitoring and evaluation activities in line with whole-school practice and now has a more secure understanding of the experiences of students in the sixth form. Together with senior leaders, she has reviewed the strategy to enrol students on to courses in the sixth form to ensure that students are following the most appropriate courses to suit their abilities and to meet their needs. This will require careful monitoring in the future.

The quality of governance has improved since the convening of the school improvement board. Members have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are clear about the school's priorities. Attendance at meetings is good, reflecting a commitment to the school. Members of the SIB are knowledgeable and have a range of expertise which they bring to discussions. They have significantly increased the degree of challenge with which leaders are held to account.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers have a clearer understanding of leaders' expectations of their classroom practice. For example, staff are aware of the priority to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and to ensure that appropriate levels of challenge are provided for all pupils. Leaders have ensured that assessments are more regular and accurate and this information is collated and shared with all staff. However, teachers do not routinely use this information when planning their lessons. This means that the least able pupils are not effectively supported and the most able are not sufficiently challenged. As a result, pupils are not making the rapid progress necessary to achieve at the levels of which they are capable. Although the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection, significant further improvements are necessary for all, but particularly for mixed-ability classes. It is vital that teachers use information about what pupils are able to do to plan activities which meet their learning needs.

Teachers do not consistently apply the school's marking and feedback policy. Pupils say that this has improved but that there are wide inconsistencies within and between subjects and year groups. Pupils' workbooks also clearly demonstrate this. Where feedback is most effective, pupils are encouraged to respond to teachers' guidance and comments, and this has a clear impact on their learning. Leaders have also introduced 'target time', where pupils are expected to reflect on and to improve their work. Inspectors noted some good examples of this practice where pupils had really thought about how to respond to teachers' feedback, resulting in tangible improvements to their work. However, too often, pupils are not challenged when they do not follow teachers' instructions, for example in making corrections to their work. Furthermore, too often, teachers' feedback does not provide pupils with the guidance they need to improve. Again, there have been improvements in this aspect of teachers' work since the last inspection but more needs to be done to improve consistency of feedback and the impact that it has on pupils' progress.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. Inspectors noted particular strengths in science and mathematics. Teachers use this knowledge to form probing questions which help pupils to develop their understanding. Inspectors also noted instances where pupils were asking insightful questions of teachers which again led to effective discussion.

Changes in staffing in science and mathematics have led to improvements in the quality of provision in these areas. However, this has not yet had a demonstrable impact on outcomes for pupils. Leaders are aware of the need to strengthen leadership in humanities and have appointed a new head of history for September.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have introduced a new behaviour and rewards policy which has raised expectations for behaviour in lessons and around school. Pupils and staff believe that behaviour has improved, but pupils also say that too often their lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Low-level disruption has reduced, but further improvements are necessary. Pupils say that teachers do not yet consistently follow the school's behaviour policy and that some teachers move to more serious sanctions too quickly. Where teaching is stronger, there is less low-level disruption because teachers plan to meet the needs of pupils who are engaged and involved in their learning. Where teachers expect pupils to work on the same tasks, regardless of their ability, pupils engage in off-task behaviour and low-level disruption increases.

The school's presentation policy has been re-emphasised and the standard of presentation of pupils' work has improved. However, there are too many examples of poor presentation which has not been challenged. Again, this is directly linked to teachers' expectations and the quality of teaching. For example, where pupils are not challenged by their work, they take less care and engage in off-task doodling

and scribbling. As with the marking and feedback policy, teachers do not consistently apply the school's presentation policy.

External support

The trust has provided effective support since the last inspection. They appointed the interim headteacher and convened the school improvement board. Both have been effective in securing improvements. The trust has commissioned a number of external reviews. These include evaluations of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, behaviour, and teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders have responded well to advice and ensured that action has been taken against the recommendations made in these reviews.

Leaders have been proactive in seeking external support from other schools, both locally and nationally. For example, middle leaders have visited other schools to learn from good practice in successful science and mathematics departments.