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20 November 2017

Mrs Meena Gabbi
Principal
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Northamptonshire
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Dear Mrs Gabbi

Special measures monitoring inspection of Montsaye Academy

Following my visit with Sian Hampton and Graeme Rudland, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 1 and 2 November 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 during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school 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.

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school 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 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 second monitoring inspection on 1 November 2017 to 2 November 2017

Evidence

Inspectors met with the principal, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and a group of staff. They also met with representatives of the school improvement board. Inspectors met formally with a group of pupils and spoke with others during the course of the two days, both in their lessons and around school. Inspectors visited parts of 25 lessons, some with senior leaders, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses they observed. Inspectors visited pupils in their tutor groups. Inspectors looked at pupils' work in their lessons and in a sample of books taken from a range of subjects and year groups. A range of documents were scrutinised, including school improvement plans, safeguarding information, records relating to attendance and behaviour, and monitoring and evaluation records. Inspectors evaluated the impact of the actions that leaders have taken since the last monitoring inspection, with particular focus on the quality of leadership and management, personal development, behaviour and welfare and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been considerable changes to staffing, including within the leadership team. The interim principal has left and been replaced by a permanent principal who took up her post in September 2017. One of the vice-principals has left the school, a second is due to leave in December and the third is due to take up the role of assistant vice-principal in January 2018. The principal has externally appointed a new senior vice-principal who will also take up post in January.

There have been further changes within the teaching staff. Eight new teachers have joined the school since September, including middle leaders in humanities, social science and mathematics.

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). Governance is provided by the SIB and the MCLP.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal has taken swift and effective action to build on the improvements evident at the last monitoring visit. She has a clear vision for the school's development and has communicated high expectations of staff and pupils. She has taken decisive action to restructure the leadership team, which has provided further

clarity of roles and a renewed drive and focus on the most pertinent aspects of necessary improvements. Monitoring activities focus entirely on improving the quality of education provided by the school with a view to improve pupils' outcomes. The principal has made sure that all staff understand their role in ensuring that all pupils make the rapid progress necessary to raise standards.

The principal responds quickly when weaknesses are identified. She is also highly strategic, demonstrating her determination for sustained and long-term improvements. Staff feel listened to and empowered to improve their practice. All staff are supportive of the principal in realising her aims for school improvement. They appreciate the robustness of leaders' monitoring and the appropriate balance of challenge and support they receive in the drive for improvements. As one member of staff described, there is now 'greater rigour and vigour'.

Improving the quality of teaching has, rightly, remained the school's key priority. Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of teaching throughout the school, and are providing relevant and appropriate support and challenge to ensure that teachers' practice improves. For example, inspectors observed the leader for teaching, learning and assessment skilfully evaluating staff's practice with clarity and formative precision. Training focuses on staff needs and is more bespoke to individuals than in the past. Staff value the training opportunities provided and recognise the positive impact that they have on their understanding and skills. In addition, the principal is currently in the process of developing a staff coaching programme. This will share the best practice in the school, developing non-leaders as well as leaders, to support others to improve the quality of teaching in all areas. To underpin this work, the principal has introduced a new performance management policy, which ensures that staff performance is evaluated in terms of their teaching and the impact that this has on pupils' progress. It also identifies targets for staff development, which are used to inform the staff training programme. This approach ensures that all are focused on the simple, but vital, principle of improving the quality of teaching in order to improve pupils' outcomes.

At the time of the last monitoring visit, leaders had introduced raising standards leader (RSL) meetings which scrutinise pupils' progress and identify actions to further improvements. These meetings have increased the level of accountability of both middle leaders and class teachers. The RSL has extended this work by incorporating other key areas of the school. Thus, he now also meets with the head of the sixth form and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) to apply the same degree of scrutiny to these aspects of the school's work.

The principal has made changes to the structure of pastoral support. In the past, the school has operated a house system, where pupils were grouped vertically, in mixed ages, for tutoring and pastoral activities. While aspects of this system have been retained and pupils still benefit from the support of skilled and experienced pastoral mentors, pupils are now placed into year-based tutor groups. A progress

leader has been assigned to each year group, who works closely with tutors, heads of subjects and the RSL to monitor pupils' progress and to intervene where necessary. This system has increased the degree of consistency and the robustness with which progress is evaluated. It also means that progress leaders can ensure that appropriate support is put in place quickly when pupils fall behind. Progress leaders have a detailed understanding of individual pupils' progress but the relative infancy of this structure means that it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work. This will be explored during the next monitoring visit.

The last monitoring visit identified the need to significantly improve the leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The principal has appointed a temporary SENCo who has undertaken much work to improve provision in this area, from a considerably low starting point. Pupils' needs are now accurately identified, enabling more appropriate support to be put in place. The SENCo liaises with teaching staff and provides information as to how they should meet pupils' needs. As a result, teachers are now more informed about pupils' needs and are clearer about how they should be meeting them. However, the SENCo does not monitor provision in lessons and during the visit there was little evidence that teachers were applying this understanding. Leaders are aware that to further improve the provision for this group of pupils, much closer monitoring and evaluation is required, in line with whole-school approaches.

Leadership of the sixth form was assessed at the last monitoring visit. At that time, inspectors recognised that the sixth-form leader was taking greater responsibility for the monitoring of provision for students in Years 12 and 13, in line with whole-school approaches. Leaders had also reviewed the enrolment strategy with a view to ensuring that students were following appropriate courses. However, these actions have not been consolidated and there has been little improvement in the leadership of the sixth-form provision since the last monitoring visit. In 2017, the proportion of Year 12 students who did not continue with their studies into Year 13 was considerably higher than national averages. Leaders do not have a clear understanding of the reasons for this. There is not yet an effective mechanism to ensure that students are guided and supported to enrol on courses in which they can successfully achieve. Furthermore, the sixth-form leader does not take a strategic role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision in the sixth form. The principal recognises the need to urgently strengthen leadership in this aspect of the school's work.

The inspection in November 2016 identified the need to ensure that funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used to raise their achievement. The last monitoring visit recognised that action taken to address this had not been swift enough. Action that leaders have taken to improve the quality of teaching across the school and to improve systems for tracking pupils' progress has ensured that disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved in line with the improvements seen in all pupils' progress. However, the allocation of additional funding is still not carefully planned. This means that leaders are unable to evaluate the impact of this funding, nor are

they able to amend the strategy for its allocation. Leaders are aware of the need to urgently address this and during the course of the inspection they began to develop a spending plan for the current academic year. The impact of this work will be closely scrutinised at the next monitoring visit.

The work to develop pupils' reading and literacy skills has continued. Since the last monitoring visit, leaders have ensured that the responsibility for pupils' literacy development extends beyond that of the English department. There is now greater clarity in whole-school expectations to improve pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, these expectations are not yet met consistently. Leaders are monitoring this and challenging staff as appropriate. Leaders have maintained the promotion of DEAR (drop everything and read), which continues to be observed and appreciated by all. The introduction of a new reading programme in September 2017 has encouraged further and more varied reading, while also ensuring that pupils are reading texts that better match their levels of reading ability. The library is a vibrant, welcoming space, which is well used by pupils at social times and during lessons. The librarian provides valuable support to pupils in selecting appropriate texts and in encouraging a love of reading.

The strengths in governance which were evident at the last monitoring visit have been maintained and further improved. Members of the school improvement board have a very detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and maintain regular contact with leaders to ensure that they are providing effective support and challenge. They recognise areas in need of urgent attention, for example their responsibility to hold leaders to account for the impact of the spending of the pupil premium funding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The principal has introduced a whole-school assessment policy. This has provided clarity of assessment processes at key stage 4. However, more work is required at key stage 3 to ensure that all understand the structures and systems of assessment practice and to ensure that it is accurately and consistently applied.

There is now greater application of the school's marking and feedback policy, including in regard to literacy. Leaders are monitoring teachers' adherence to this policy closely to ensure that all staff routinely meet expectations. Pupils appreciate the continued use of 'target time', where they are expected to reflect on and improve their work. However, pupils say that they are not always supported to make necessary improvements and do not always understand what they need to do to improve their work.

The principal has introduced a new framework for teachers' planning to address the need to ensure that teachers plan to meet the needs of pupils with different abilities. There is an expectation that all lessons incorporate activities pitched at four different levels of challenge: cautious, confident, challenge and challenge plus. This

practice has been adopted consistently throughout the school. However, teachers do not yet ensure that pupils are routinely guided to select the activities that meet their learning needs. Pupils say that in the majority of lessons they choose which activity they want to work on. This means that sometimes pupils, particularly the most able, are not sufficiently challenged, nor are the least able pupils effectively supported.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last monitoring visit as a result of the actions here described. Further improvement in this aspect of the school's work remains a key priority.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils continue to respond well to high expectations of behaviour. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Pupils feel that their teachers care about them and want them to do well. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school.

Leaders have made further amendments to the behaviour policy that was introduced following the full inspection in November 2016. There is now a very clear hierarchy of sanctions and rewards. Pupils say that the policy is more consistently applied than at the last monitoring visit but that there are still some staff who do not follow it fairly. Nevertheless, behaviour continues to improve and there are fewer instances of low-level disruption than in the past. As at the last monitoring visit, weaker teaching leads to an increase in low-level disruption.

Inspectors noted an improvement in the standard of presentation in pupils' workbooks at the last monitoring visit. Again, this has continued to improve and there are fewer examples of untidy work. The vast majority of pupils take pride in their work and are keen to meet expectations.

In response to pupils' feedback, leaders have amended the timings of the school day, shortening lunchtime and lengthening breaktime, which was previously seen by pupils as a rush. Leaders have also relocated the tutor period to the start of the day and lengthened its duration. This part of the day provides opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the wider world, for example through discussing topical issues. Tutors also use this session to ensure that pupils are ready to start their day, for example by ensuring that any problems are resolved. Pupils appreciate these activities, which they say help prepare them to learn. Pupils are extremely positive about the support they receive from their tutors.

Whole-school attendance, and particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, is below the national average and has not improved since the last monitoring visit. Leaders are taking appropriate action, for example by contacting parents and undertaking home visits. They have also appointed a new attendance officer from January 2018. The impact of this work will be evaluated at the next monitoring visit.

Outcomes for pupils

In recent years, pupils have made considerably less progress than others nationally. Following his appointment in January 2017, the interim principal took immediate and decisive action to tackle fundamental weaknesses in leadership, at all levels, and the quality of teaching throughout the school. In 2017, pupils' overall outcomes improved because they made more rapid progress than in the past. However, pupils' progress remains slightly below national averages.

Disadvantaged pupils have also made very poor progress in recent years. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils' progress also improved, but, again, remains considerably below national averages. Current plans to improve outcomes for this group of pupils are now more specific than they have been in the past. Leaders are beginning to assess the impact of actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils but they do not yet evaluate their work with precision, particularly with regard to their use of the additional funding.

In mathematics, pupils' progress, including that of disadvantaged pupils, improved in 2017, although it remains considerably below national averages. In English, pupils' progress dipped. However, pupils' performance in this subject is stronger than in mathematics and clear plans are in place to ensure that outcomes improve to match and improve on those achieved in previous years.

Leaders are tracking the progress of current pupils closely. The newly convened progress leaders' group is fundamental to this aspect of the school's work. At the time of the monitoring visit it was too early to evaluate the impact of its work. This will be examined at the next monitoring visit.

External support

The trust has continued to provide effective support. For example, since the last monitoring visit, it commissioned a review of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the outcomes of which have been acted upon by leaders.

Leaders continue to be proactive in seeking support from other schools, both locally and nationally. They are keen that all staff benefit and learn from working with other schools and in the sharing of their good practice.