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Mr Simon
Nene Gate School
Park Lane
Peterborough
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Dear Mr Simon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Nene Gate School

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 December 2010, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are 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 – satisfactory

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Peterborough.

Yours sincerely

George Derby
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2009

- Raise achievement by reducing the levels of absence and exclusions and ensuring that teaching always challenges students' learning.
- Improve the curriculum by ensuring that it meets the needs, interests and abilities of all students and that all students receive the full number of recommended hours of teaching time.
- Ensure that a literacy strategy is put in place across the school.
- Implement a system to assess and track students' progress and use this data to plan future learning.

Special measures: monitoring of Nene Gate School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives from the local authority. A meeting took place with the managers of the alternative provision at Peterborough College. Brief conversations also took place with members of the school's staff and students.

Context

Since the last visit and the departure of two teachers, another two teaching appointments have been made. Both staff started at the beginning of September, although one resigned at the end of October and is no longer working in the school. Two other staff were absent at the time of this inspection, awaiting formal meetings following suspension. Student numbers have increased and there are now 36 pupils on roll. It is the local authority's intention that the school should reach full capacity within the current school year. The staffing difficulties over recent months have caused some slowing of the school's response to managing its actions for improvement.

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

The school has students' improved achievements clearly in focus and is now providing a wider range in vocational and academic courses which are interesting and motivating them. Year 10 and 11 students have a much better work ethic and through the school's careers work and work related opportunities, they have a stronger commitment to doing the best they can. This is having a positive impact on their progress and is getting them back on track.

The school's 2010 GCSE results are an improvement on the previous year's figures. Although these are well below the national average, the range of courses and grades has increased. It is also a notable achievement that students gained GCSE passes in science, as well as in English and mathematics, despite the GCSE science course only commencing in January 2010. In most subjects, the grades students attained were D and E, although in science two achieved grade C. For a few students, this represents satisfactory progress from their starting points, although for most it is below that expected. This is because of the school's legacy of poor teaching. A few students did not take academic qualifications, although they did achieve City and Guilds certificates in a small number of courses. In mathematics, the current Year 11 students have already taken their GCSE examinations. They sat these when they

were in Year 10. This is a good move and has given them a positive boost. Although they all gained lower grades, they are now working towards the higher levels.

The school has much better ways of tracking students' progress and is using national progression guidance as well as measures for comparing its students with similar groups. It has set targets for individuals based on their starting points and is now formally assessing their work each half term. The progress across Key Stage 3 in 2010, since the school has been more accurately assessing students' academic levels, has been inadequate in English, good in mathematics and satisfactory in science. The lack of some students' literacy skills is recognised by the school and specific accelerated reading skills work is now provided for individuals. However, the tutor period, which is also intended to be a quiet period to improve students' attitudes to reading, is not always effectively used for this purpose.

The progress in lessons seen was broadly satisfactory, although this was variable across the school. On occasion, it was good or outstanding, but was sometimes inadequate. Students showed increased concentration and worked more purposefully when they were aware of what they were meant to learn and when they got feedback about what they had achieved. Improved identification of what individuals should be learning in relation to their capabilities has resulted in them enjoying the challenge of the work presented. Where students' learning was inadequate, the pace was slowed because of low level behavioural difficulties, teaching was ineffective and students worked unproductively.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Although behaviour had improved, and the number of exclusions had reduced at the time of the last visit, this term has seen an increase in challenging behaviour from students. This change has been mainly as a result of the school's staffing difficulties and a lack of effective student management by some staff. This has led to an increased number of exclusions compared with the previous period. Senior staff have now stabilised the situation and the introduction recently of the new grading system for student behaviour, 'Going for Green', is popular. Behaviour during the inspection was satisfactory overall with only a few examples where this fell below the school's expectations. Students receive red, amber or green coloured spots according to specific criteria and can also gain merits. This is having a positive impact and students are aware of the need to modify their behaviour; most try hard to do so. While the system is having a good effect, a very small number of staff are still not consistent in the way they apply the criteria for rewarding students' behaviour. Other features of the school's programme are having a positive effect on students' behaviour. Students look forward to 'Lesson 7' activities which are the daily reward activities for points gained through the incentive system. The school's seclusion room is working well in helping students to calm down and reflect on their behaviour and is enabling them to return to lessons more quickly.

A big improvement is evident in the way in which the school is tackling persistent absence and non-attendance. The overall attendance figures for this term are a marked improvement on previous visits. Students whose previous attendance was poor are now all allocated courses offsite and nearly all are regular attenders. This has boosted the school's attendance figures and during one week this term, these were at 95%. Rigorous, close monitoring and follow up, using school staff and local authority personnel, have had a positive impact. In extreme cases, legal action is helping to get the message across, especially when there is little or no response from parents or carers. The overall attendance rate is still below average though. The school is not complacent and knows it needs to continue to tackle attendance, especially where it is low, as in Year 9.

The effectiveness of provision

The teaching seen in lessons was satisfactory with some that was inadequate and some which was good or outstanding. However, the school is not likely to achieve its target of 50% of good or better teaching by January 2011. This is because senior leaders do not yet fully ensure that the features of good teaching are essential ingredients of all lessons.

The local authority has worked hard to ensure that staff have received training on the key aspects of teaching which lead to good learning and progress. These features are seen more frequently throughout lessons, but are not yet consistent. Teachers are now more regularly sharing with students what they are meant to learn, providing wider ways of engaging and involving them in learning and checking out that they are learning effectively. Work is more challenging than it was and better use is made of information about students' levels of attainment to plan work. The management of students' behaviour is also more effective since the last visit, although the school encountered difficulties relating to new staff earlier this term. Teachers and assistants are now better equipped to manage behaviour with less need to resort to restraint.

The work undertaken by the local authority on the role and use of teaching assistants in lessons is bearing fruit. There is now a greater focus by them on learning and much less on task completion and there is less 'over-helping' of students. Teachers, too, are much more focused on the student outcomes expected by the end of the lesson and nearly all personalise these in their plans. There are generally better systems for assessing students, providing personal feedback and recording their progress over time. However, too little use is made of plenary sessions, to assess and revisit learning, to focus on next steps and for students to evaluate each other's work.

On occasion, a few staff are still unclear about their role in promoting learning and students have too much leeway to remain unfocused and off task; sometimes inappropriate language goes unchallenged. As a result of all this, the pace of lessons

slows and students do not learn enough. The pace in English lessons is, at times, far too slow.

The school has expanded the range of its curriculum to include the full National Curriculum, which now includes the resistant materials part of design and technology and BTEC vocational courses on site. These include sport, construction, public services and information and communication technology, which students can opt for. All students now receive 25 hours of education, either at school or with another institution. Links with offsite providers have improved. Opportunities afforded by these links are proving popular with students and providing wider opportunities for them to be taught in a more adult environment.

The range of therapy, mental health, and clinical and educational psychology support has also extended. The school is making good use of a range of professional agencies in the city to help students and their families.

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

- raise achievement by reducing the levels of absence and exclusions and ensuring that teaching always challenges students' learning – satisfactory
- improve the curriculum by ensuring that it meets the needs, interests and abilities of all students and that all students receive the full number of recommended hours of teaching time - satisfactory
- ensure that a literacy strategy is put in place across the school – not fully inspected on this visit
- implement a system to assess and track students' progress and use this data to plan future learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher provides clear leadership and is not afraid to tackle difficult situations, especially in the pursuit of improving quality within the school. Staffing issues have slowed the pace of development this term but the school is now back on track. The improvement plan continues to contain the right key areas of focus and the next steps to achieve these, although not all areas for improvement are included. Analysis of the school's 2010 Key Stage 4 results and students' progress in subjects overall has been undertaken by senior staff; English has been identified as a relative weakness. However, no specific areas for improvement have yet been focused upon.

Senior leaders are taking greater responsibility for their areas and their leadership skills are improving. The headteacher's absence one day per week is enabling the deputy headteacher to take a greater responsibility for pastoral care and discipline. The assistant headteacher's knowledge and skills in the use of assessment and in tracking progress have improved as a result of the support provided by the local authority. Senior leaders have had some opportunities to observe teaching in

conjunction with local authority personnel and are aware of the features of teaching which need to improve. As a next step, the school is to take an even greater role in managing the improvements in teaching and learning. This is to grow leaders' capacity further and to achieve greater consistency in the good features of teaching across the school.

Other leaders have successfully developed the vocational and offsite programmes and have supported the positive improvement in attendance.

The school's line management system has been reviewed and is now beginning to ensure that all staff are challenged and held to account. However, this is not yet fully embedded in practice and a specific weakness exists in the oversight of English.

The governing body, well led by the Chair of the Governing Body, is now better placed to hold the school to account. Although significantly under strength in terms of numbers, governors are very knowledgeable, hold key areas of responsibility and take an active part in the work of the school and its improvement.

External support

The local authority and the school's external partner have continued to provide good support, especially with regard to the improvement in the use of teaching assistants, the introduction of the new behaviour reward system and headteacher's capacity to lead and manage the school. The local authority is now ensuring that its support is balanced with the need to ensure that the leadership team grows its capacity further but is continuing to provide support in much needed areas. It is to re-establish a focus on English teaching.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the progress that students make in English, especially by increasing the pace of learning in lessons.
- Drive forward improvements in teaching and learning, focusing further on the better use of plenary sessions to reinforce and assess learning, ensuring greater consistency in good practice across the school and that the school reaches its targets for good or better teaching.