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19 December 2015

Mr A Nicholson
Principal
Montgomery High School – A Language College and Full Service School
All Hallows Road
Blackpool
Lancashire
FY2 0AZ

Dear Mr Nicholson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Montgomery High School – A Language College and Full Service School

Following my visit with Susan Lomas, Ofsted Inspector, and Lenford White, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 8–9 December 2015, 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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 school may continue to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). I recommend strongly that any such NQTs are provided with opportunities to observe good and better teaching.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Blackpool and to CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2014

- Raise the quality of teaching in order to accelerate the progress of all groups of students, particularly those eligible for the pupil premium, the most-able students and those with special educational needs and raise standards across the school, especially in mathematics and science, by:
 - making sure all teachers adapt their teaching to the needs and abilities of all groups of students and that they move students on more quickly when it is clear they are ready
 - ensuring all teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve by increasing the level of challenge, particularly for the most-able students so that they make good or better progress
 - developing teachers' questioning skills so that students are given more opportunities to explore issues in greater depth
 - improving the quality of marking in all subjects so that it is regular and precise, with clear information provided to students as to the next steps in their learning and provide students with the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments and improve their work
 - disseminating more effectively existing good practice
 - further developing existing guidelines to promote students' numeracy skills and making sure all teachers follow these guidelines in the classroom.

- Improve students' punctuality to lessons by making sure all teachers challenge students when they arrive late and that students understand the consequences of not arriving on time.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - using performance management more effectively to eradicate underperformance and reward good practice
 - tightening up procedures to ensure all staff follow school policies by rigorously checking up on whether they are being implemented
 - ensuring all heads of department are effectively held to account for students' achievement in their area of responsibility
 - improving the overall leadership and management of teaching by checking that initiatives, policies and staff training are making a difference to practice in the classroom
 - improving self-evaluation so that it more accurately reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the school
 - sharpening procedures for collecting information on students' achievement so that it clearly demonstrates the progress they have made from their individual starting points and use this information more effectively to hold all teachers to account for the progress of students in their classes

- ensuring that funds available through the pupil premium secure improvement in the achievement of students eligible for such support
- undertaking an external review of governance to make sure governors challenge the school more effectively to raise standards. The external review should have a specific focus on the use of the pupil premium.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 8–9 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal. They also met with: members of the school's leadership team; 28 pupils; two members of the governing body (known as the Academy Council) including the Chair; a group of middle leaders; a group of teachers; and a representative of the Fylde Coast Academy Trust.

Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching and learning, visiting 14 classes. During this time, inspectors observed the teaching and learning in the lessons taught, spoke with pupils, looked at the information held by teachers about the progress of pupils within the classes and examined work in pupils' books. Five such visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team.

Inspectors carried out informal learning walks during the school day, including at lunchtime, and took the opportunity to speak with pupils on these occasions.

Inspectors also took into account the 17 responses received from parents on Parent View in the 365 days up to and including 26 November 2015. They also took into account responses received by parents through the school's own survey conducted in November 2015.

Because Montgomery High is known by the title 'school', this terminology is used throughout this report.

Context

The senior leadership of the school has changed since the April 2015 monitoring inspection. A new Principal has been appointed on an interim basis. He is a member of the Fylde Coast Academy Trust (FCAT) and leads an outstanding school in Lancashire. An associate principal from a good school in Lancashire local authority has also been appointed to support the school for two years. The roles of all senior leaders have been revised. In addition, 17 members of staff have left the school since the April 2015 monitoring inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

Examination results in 2015 saw the percentage of pupils gaining five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A–C rise from 54% in 2014 to 56%. Rates of progress made by the Year 11 pupils who left in summer 2015 also rose overall, albeit by small amounts. As leaders acknowledge, gaps between pupils for whom the pupil premium is intended or who have additional needs remain too wide.

The progress made by pupils currently at the school continues to improve but remains variable. A key factor in this variability is that not all assessments of what pupils can do are secure. Importantly, leaders recognise this and are taking action to improve this quality. The senior leader responsible for assessment has, for example, undertaken a rigorous review of all information provided by teachers and departments. Consequently, she has been able to pinpoint exactly where pupils' progress is in line with expectations, in English for example, and where it is not. This information is now better used to identify which pupils require additional support or challenge. Leaders rightly expect the half-termly cycles of assessment to be wholly accurate by the end of January 2016. Leaders and staff, confirmed through discussions with inspectors, are clear that the success of the newly introduced pupil 'flight paths' plotting at least expected progress from agreed starting points depends upon such accuracy.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The improvement in the quality of teaching reported in April 2015 continues. No inadequate teaching was evident during this monitoring inspection – this is a good improvement over time. Teachers' and assistants' awareness of the needs of different groups of pupils, those disadvantaged or with additional needs for example, is strengthening day by day. The work of the senior leaders responsible for teaching and for assessment in ensuring that all staff are aware of needs and focus on the difference teaching is making to pupils' learning is paying dividends.

The previous monitoring inspection reported that some teachers were asking searching questions that teased out pupils' understanding of what was being taught. Such good questioning is increasingly common. Consequently, pupils' knowledge and understanding are improving. Such questioning challenges pupils to think more deeply about their responses. In Year 8, for example, teachers of personal, social, health and citizenship education enabled their pupils to consider maturely issues such as family relationships and human sexuality.

Also improving is the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils. Where this is best, the feedback is sharply focused on what pupils must do to improve. Furthermore, teachers ensure their advice is heeded. The result is that pupils make gains in their learning. Sometimes, though, the good advice given is not heeded, in the correction of spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors for example, meaning that errors are repeated.

While levels of challenge to pupils are increasing, they are not consistently strong across the school. Sometimes the use of worksheets limits the ability of pupils to produce the well-thought-out extended pieces of writing that their oral contributions deserve. A key factor in improving rates of progress of pupils as they enter school in Year 7 is the work undertaken with local primary schools to support transition. A new facet of this work is the link with a feeder school's headteacher, who is also a

national leader of education. Each curriculum area has a 'transition champion'. These champions link with colleagues from primary schools to ensure pupils do not repeat work they can already do. While this work has yet to be evaluated, early indications are that pupils in Year 7 are being presented with greater levels of challenge than in the past.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils spoken with, both formally and informally, were overwhelmingly positive about the school and the improvements they had seen, particularly since September 2015. Whereas in the April 2015 monitoring inspection they had mixed views about behaviour, they were eager to point out how much better it had become. One key reason pupils gave for this – and inspectors agree – is that the attendance of teachers has improved markedly. Pupils are correct in their views that this means their education and personal development are disrupted far less now than in the past. As well as improving behaviour, the greater stability in staffing has also contributed significantly to pupils' attitudes to learning. As well as incidents of poor behaviour reducing, the number of exclusions has fallen and pupil attendance is rising. Not that leaders or indeed pupils are complacent; they recognise that some pupils are a little boisterous around the corridors and on the playground. Leaders also recognise that boys for whom the pupil premium is intended have higher rates of exclusion than other pupils at the school.

Also improved are levels of punctuality to lessons. While the 'one minute late, one hour detention' policy is not universally popular with pupils, those who spoke to inspectors saw it as being highly effective. Also effective in pupils' eyes is the highly visible presence of leaders and staff around the school. Where standards of behaviour fall below expectations, the close proximity of such high levels of supervision quickly nips problems in the bud.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons during this inspection was mostly good. The 'consequence' system is understood by pupils and staff alike. A few pupils who have found managing their own behaviour difficult and have disrupted the learning of others as well as their own are being supported and challenged well to amend their ways. Such pupils attend school from 2pm to 6pm and benefit from small-group tuition. Not only are they making progress in their learning, they are understanding increasingly well that negative attitudes to learning affect others as well as themselves.

Pupils spoken with reported that they felt safe in school. They articulated well the need for tolerance and respect. They wore their uniforms with pride.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

'There is a positive buzz around the school'. 'We are playing as part of a team'. 'People want the school to change'. 'We are empowered'. These comments typify the views of the staff who spoke with inspectors. They indicate the 'can-do' attitude that permeates the school. Staff morale, improving at the last monitoring inspection, is riding high.

The reason for this positive culture is simple. Leaders, particularly the trust, and the Principal and associate principal are clear in their expectations that only the best is good enough. Senior leaders and staff throughout the school are clear about what they need to do as individuals and teams to help the school improve. The robust systems for performance management reported in April 2015 have been strengthened further. Staff who spoke to inspectors were clear that the targets set for them were challenging, achievable, supported through training, and fair.

The development of staff is given high priority. Good use is made of good practice that exists in other schools, in the Principal's and associate principal's former schools for example. The Montgomery lesson plan, for example, has been revised so there is now a much sharper focus on what pupils are to learn. Training sessions are regular and include the sharing of practical ideas through what leaders call 'speed-dating' sessions. As a result, teachers are learning from each other and seeing the benefits through improving levels of pupil progress. The trust also plays a key role in supporting improvement through the appointment of a lead science teacher to work across a number of FCAT academies, for example. As a result of this work, Montgomery teachers have been able to observe and learn from good practice in other schools and academies. Consequently, the quality of teaching in science is improving.

The Academy Council holds leaders to account well, for example, through challenging leaders to consider the link between pupils' punctuality and their attendance. The school's self-evaluation highlights well the actions it has taken. Leaders agree it could be sharpened to focus on the difference the actions taken have had on improving outcomes for pupils and their personal development.

External support

The support and challenge to leaders, including the Academy Council, provided by FCAT are strong. The thorough overhaul of what the trust expects leaders to do and to achieve is testament to this. The urgency displayed by FCAT leaders to secure improvement continues apace.