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Mr C Tomlinson
Executive Headteacher
The Eltham Foundation School
1 Middle Park Avenue
Eltham
London
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Dear Mr Tomlinson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Eltham Foundation School

Following my visit with Stephen Long HMI, and Evelyn Riley and Lynne Kauffman, additional inspectors, to your school on 16–17 May 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2010. 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 – good.

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed.

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 Greenwich.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2010

- Secure better achievement across subjects, and especially in the core subjects.
- Eliminate the number of lessons that are inadequate or just satisfactory so that teaching consistently engages students in their learning, enables students to make better progress and minimises the time wasted through persistent low-level disruption by:
 - providing appropriate training to ensure that all staff are accurate in their assessments of students' work against national standards
 - using secure assessment information to plan learning activities that support individual learning needs well
 - developing teachers' skills in the use of strategies to check that learning is taking place throughout the lesson
 - providing greater challenge and pace to accelerate students' progress
 - ensuring that agreed behaviour management systems are applied consistently well throughout the school.
- Ensure that leaders at all levels, including governors, rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the school so they understand and take actions necessary to increase the rate of improvement by:
 - monitoring and evaluating practice at all levels based on regular, accurate and robust assessments that lead to focused, precise and effective interventions to raise achievement
 - ensuring the governing body has the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to regularly challenge the performance of the school.
- Improve attendance and ensure students arrive punctually to lessons.

Special measures: monitoring of Eltham Foundation School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 16–17 May 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, staff, groups of students, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. A telephone discussion was also held with an adviser appointed by the Department for Education.

Context

After the last inspection, an interim headteacher led the school until December 2010. He was replaced in January 2011 by an executive headteacher, who also leads the partner school, and a permanent headteacher, also previously employed at the partner school.

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

Progress and attainment are rising strongly from a low base. Students in all years are enjoying lessons more because of their accelerating progress and because they are responding well to the challenge of the higher targets they have been set. The school's predictions for better GCSE results this year are based on accurate data arising from early examination entry results and analysis of moderated coursework and module grades. There has been a successful focus on improving key subjects, such as English and mathematics, and outcomes for Year 11 students who have been most affected by the legacy of past underachievement. Gaps in progress between subjects are beginning to narrow. However, improvement in science is lagging behind other areas because the quality of subject provision remains weak.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Secure better achievement across subjects, and especially in the core subjects – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students say that behaviour has transformed for the better since January. They appreciate the high visibility of senior staff throughout school and this helps them to feel safe. They understand and are responsive to improved systems for managing behaviour. Relationships between students and staff are good-humoured and constructive and most students are welcoming and polite. Due to the 'zero tolerance' of poor behaviour instituted by the new leadership team, exclusion figures were initially high. They are now falling because staff management of behaviour is improving and because students are coming to terms with what is expected of them.

The persistent disruptive behaviour identified in the last inspection as inhibiting learning is no longer in evidence. In the majority of lessons observed, students were attentive and keen to learn. Although off-task behaviour was seen, it was generally linked to weaker teaching, for example because activities were not sufficiently challenging to sustain students' interest.

More effective systems are now in place to promote good attendance and punctuality. Although attendance remains lower than the national average, it is almost six per cent higher than at this time last year. A strengthened and highly committed home liaison team works successfully with parents, carers, students and other agencies to address issues underlying poor attendance. Well-managed off-site facilities provide an effective alternative to school for those at greatest risk of exclusion. Open and constructive partnerships with staff offering external provision and with parents and carers mean that education is maintained for the most vulnerable. As a result, rates of persistent absence are also falling.

High expectations of punctuality are reinforced by the daily presence of senior staff on the school gate. Students accept the stringent sanctions associated with the 'late on the gate' system. Lateness to school, which was at unacceptably high levels, is reducing rapidly. Students are now generally punctual to lessons and understand their responsibility not to interrupt learning if they are delayed.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve attendance and ensure students arrive punctually to lessons – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is beginning to improve so that there are more effective lessons, but there are still too many which are inadequate or satisfactory. Additional support through individual intervention sessions staffed by a commercial provider is being targeted at Year 11 students. This is closely monitored by the school and is instrumental in improving these students' achievement and remedying deficits in their learning. A much improved system for setting targets and assessing students' progress has been set up. This is used to increasingly good effect to identify underachieving students and provide extra support, and is beginning to support better lesson planning overall.

There is an increasingly shared understanding amongst staff that only consistently good or better day-to-day teaching is acceptable so that students rarely require additional intervention. Senior leaders are uncompromising in pursuing this goal and the best lessons are beginning to reflect their vision for effective teaching. In these classes, teachers take careful account of assessment information in planning activities to secure good progress for all students. They ensure students understand

the purpose of the lesson clearly and see how tasks link to their individual learning targets. Teachers check progress regularly, for example through targeted questioning, and adjust the lesson accordingly. Expectations and challenge are high. Learning is strongly supported by students' better behaviour and attitudes.

However, these features of good teaching and learning are not yet sufficiently widespread. Although teachers now have better information about students' attainment and targets, they do not all use it well enough to set high expectations for all students, particularly the more able, or ensure students know how to reach their targets. Activities sometimes go on too long and are dominated by teacher explanation so that students cannot articulate and develop their ideas. In these circumstances, weaknesses in students' speaking and listening skills remain an unbreached barrier to learning. Similarly, the weak writing skills of a significant number of students mean they struggle to record work properly in lessons and teachers do not always take sufficient account of this. Where lessons are ineffective, teachers do not always check how much learning is taking place in lessons and they assume that improved behaviour automatically equates to improved learning.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Eliminate the number of lessons that are inadequate or just satisfactory so that teaching consistently engages students in their learning, enables students to make better progress and minimises the time wasted through persistent low-level disruption – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Extensive and detailed monitoring of teaching by the senior team shows a secure understanding of the overall quality of teaching and learning. They are providing appropriate support to develop the quality of teaching and adopting a robust approach where staff prove unresponsive to this. A range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching is now in place. It draws effectively on expertise from external consultants and the partner school, for example by using high performing subject leaders to work alongside their opposite number at Eltham. Coaching programmes, aimed at moving satisfactory learning and progress to consistently good, are well planned and rigorous. They draw on the expertise of the school's most effective and innovative teachers to coach and develop those whose practice is less secure. This initiative is in its early stages, however, and the persistence of some inadequate, and a substantial amount of satisfactory, learning shows that it has not yet had sufficient impact.

The executive headteacher, along with the headteacher and newly formed senior team, have successfully established a clear and ambitious vision for improvement. Lines of accountability are now stronger and leaders at all levels understand and accept their role in driving improvement in students' achievement. Improvements in

systems for monitoring and evaluation are ensuring the school knows where to place the greatest effort. Professional development for leaders is well planned, including work with staff from the partner school. School development plans are sharply focused, although it is not always clear when the impact of actions will be checked. Subject development plans for departments are also improving but are at an early stage and show variable capacity to focus sharply on learning and progress when articulating steps towards shared goals. Subject leaders are beginning to hold their departments more effectively to account, including through using the now-improved assessment information, although their impact remains highly variable.

Governors are increasingly well equipped to challenge and direct the school's ongoing development. They now work in partnership with the senior team and local authority to monitor progress against the school and local authority improvement plans. They are receiving well-targeted training, for example in data analysis and lesson observation, to enable them to scrutinise and question levels and rates of achievement. They now have a firmer grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and of how to check it is securing rapid improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure leaders at all levels, including governors, rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the school so they understand and take actions necessary to increase the rate of improvement – good.

External support

Following the inspection, the local authority drew up a statement of the action planned to support the school. This articulates appropriately challenging and ambitious objectives and dovetails well with the school improvement plan. There is effective monitoring of progress against both plans by the School Improvement Partner.

The executive headteacher moved swiftly, in collaboration with the school's key external partners, to rationalise the support provided to the school. The impact of external support is now monitored effectively and subsequent support adjusted to meet developing priorities.