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17 November 2011

Mr Patino
Headteacher
Holden Lane High School Specialist Sports College
Milton Road
Sneyd Green
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST1 6LG

Dear Mr Patino

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holden Lane High School Specialist Sports College

Following my visit with Ariane Roberts, Additional Inspector and Kevin Sheldrick, Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 15 and 16 November 2011, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2011. 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Up to three newly-qualified teachers may be appointed, but not in mathematics and science.

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 interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-On-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough

Her Majesty's Inspector

November 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on May 2011

- Raise achievement urgently in all subjects and particularly in mathematics so that students leave school with attainment that is at least in line with national averages by:
 - tackling the turbulence in staffing and recruitment and retaining high-quality practitioners, particularly in mathematics and science
 - providing a balanced curriculum that matches fully the needs and interests of boys and girls.

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion which is good or better by:
 - ensuring that planning is sharply focused on meeting the needs of all students given their starting points
 - ensuring marking and feedback make clear how well students are performing and what they need to do to improve
 - developing and applying consistently the 'behaviour for learning' policy so that students know how to gain the best from their lessons.

- Eradicate poor behaviour and ensure students feel safe by:
 - eliminating incidents of bullying
 - eliminating low-level disruption in lessons
 - improving punctuality so that students arrive on time at the start of the school day and for all lessons.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels and increase the rigour of monitoring and evaluation to ensure measurable improvements in students' performance, teaching, behaviour and safety by:
 - securing greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers
 - using more effective self-evaluation processes that set a course for improvement
 - developing the leadership capacity to manage a range of improvements simultaneously and see them through to completion
 - engaging more effectively with the immediate community and particularly with parents and carers.

Special measures: monitoring of Holden Lane High School Specialist Sports College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 November 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and incidents logs. They met with representatives of the interim executive board, a group of parents and carers, a representative from the local authority and spoke to school leaders, teachers and groups of, and individual students. They observed 29 staff teach 30 lessons. The procedures for safeguarding students were also checked and found to meet the government's requirements.

Context

Since the full inspection in May 2011 a new headteacher took up post in June 2011. An interim executive board was appointed in September 2011, replacing the existing governing body.

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

At the last inspection, attainment was above the national average but was well below average in mathematics, as had been the case for the previous three years. According to the 2011 results, attainment in English continues to be above the national average at GCSE, while attainment in mathematics remains below the national average. The lower performance in mathematics is largely explained by significant staffing issues in this subject. In 2010, boys' attainment was significantly lower than that of girls' but the 2011 results indicate that this gap has closed. This was achieved through the careful tracking of individual students, the establishment of boys-only classes and improved mentoring.

Inspection evidence indicates that students are beginning to make quicker progress. They are enjoying their lessons more and say that they are much clearer about what they are expected to learn in the majority of lessons. The school has detailed information about the attainment of each student, and teachers, heads of year and heads of department are able to judge students' progress. Year 11 students identified as being below their target are offered structured opportunities to catch up. The school's data show that attainment is now rising in mathematics, borne out by inspection evidence. However, more-able pupils are not progressing quite as well because teaching is not meeting their needs fully. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making better progress because support for these students is better organised.

Progress since the last Section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise achievement urgently in all subjects and particularly in mathematics so that students leave school with attainment that is at least in line with national averages – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour has improved since the last inspection. The school has worked hard to raise teachers' expectations related to behaviour. This is because the new behaviour policy is becoming embedded and having an impact. There are clear classroom and corridor protocols which most students adhere to. At present, this situation is assured by close and direct adult supervision at lesson changes, break times and lunchtimes. Inspectors saw very little low-level disruption in lessons and there were many lessons in which the behaviour of students made a strong contribution to their learning. A high proportion of students adopt a passive attitude when teaching is satisfactory.

Punctuality has also improved as a result of setting clear expectations and close monitoring, coupled with rewards and sanctions. One student explained to inspectors 'being late is not acceptable now – and there are consequences if we are'.

Most students are polite and courteous to visitors and are willing and confident to talk about issues. Relationships are generally positive between students and their teachers. Students say that they feel safe in school and that any bullying is dealt with effectively. They also point out that this was not always the case before the last inspection. The improved pastoral arrangements contribute to students feeling safe in the school. Students feel secure in the knowledge that there is always someone that they can turn to if they have a problem. The training and appointment of 'bully buddies' is particularly appreciated. Behaviour has not yet improved to the extent that teachers can rely on students behaving well when there are lower levels of direct adult supervision.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate poor behaviour and ensure that students feel safe – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The school has been rigorous in bringing in strategies to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers have an improved understanding of progression in lessons and are keen to improve their pedagogical skills.

The recently-introduced standardised format has led to greater consistency in planning. It has helped teachers to focus more clearly on sharing with students the criteria needed to reach certain standards. However, in most lessons, planning is inconsistently implemented because students tend to do the same tasks irrespective of ability, which means that work is not sufficiently focused on making sure that every student makes enough progress.

The use of assessment to support learning is being developed. For example, in some English lessons the sharing of level criteria led to students having a greater understanding of how to reach their target grades. Effective opportunities for students to self- and peer-assess are becoming more frequent. In the better lessons a wide variety of challenging activities, conducted at an appropriate pace, maintain the students' interest and motivation. Effective questioning involving the full class is a salient feature of much of the good teaching. Teachers provide questions which challenge the students to think, to draw on their previous learning and to give reasons for their answers. These questions are directed towards particular individuals and are used to probe students' understanding and expose their misconceptions. They contribute to high levels of concentration and allow students 'no hiding places'. In some cases they lead to reshaping of the learning. In the satisfactory lessons teachers do not give students sufficient opportunity to improve their learning through discussion or active self-evaluation. Questioning is cursory and teachers often answer their own questions and as a result students are not sufficiently involved in lessons.

Overall the quality of marking is variable. There have been some useful developments and the school has adopted the SWAN (strengths, weaknesses and next steps) approach; the new marking policy sets out clear expectations. In the best examples, marking is regular, celebrates what has been achieved and gives useful pointers on how to improve. This practice is not yet consistent across the school. The adoption of the SWAN approach is contributing to students receiving more useful feedback from their teachers. However, students are rarely given the opportunity to follow up on the advice given for the next steps.

Progress since the last Section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion which is good or better - satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Monitoring and evaluation have noticeably improved. The school is making much more accurate judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. Crucially, more effective steps are being taken to ensure improvements are made in response to the school's monitoring of teaching. The school is implementing a greater variety of approaches to improving teaching that better meet the needs of staff. The improvement seen in lessons is evidence of the increasing effectiveness of how the school manages teaching and learning.

Evidence was found of improved leadership at all levels within the school. The interim executive board is ensuring that the school is highly focused on the key improvement issues. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the greater consultation that has been apparent since the school was last inspected. Roles and responsibilities have been clarified through new job descriptions that have been subject to careful negotiation. The quality of care, support and guidance has improved as a result of new pastoral posts that have been created. There are signs that the school is increasing capacity. The school has a concise development plan that is a useful tool for monitoring progress. Leaders at all levels have been actively involved in

producing a generally accurate self-evaluation, including departmental specific documents. Leaders of the core subjects have a clear grasp of how they can further improve their areas. Senior leaders have rightly focused their attention on mathematics where improvements are now evident. There are promising signs that the staffing difficulties in recent years are being resolved.

The school has done well in being able to provide the evidence of the impact of the changes it is making, for instance through the evidence it has gathered relating to parental perceptions. To increase capacity in the short term the school is utilising external support particularly well. For instance, this has allowed the school to improve the support provided for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities quickly. A perceptive review relating to engagement with parents has resulted in the identification of appropriate improvements. The feedback the school has from parents suggests a good start has been made on improving the way the school engages with these stakeholders. The school's willingness to encourage critical feedback is further evidence that the school is increasing its capacity for sustained improvement.

The use of the sports specialism to help drive up teaching and standards is evident in the support given by the physical education department to establish applied courses in science.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels and increase the rigour of monitoring and evaluation to ensure measurable improvements in students' performance, teaching, behaviour and safety – good

External support

There has been good support from the local authority and the interim executive board. The local authority has appointed a national leader of education to support senior leaders in the school and a parent champion to good effect. The local authority has provided effective support through its improvement advisers and subject consultants, particularly in mathematics and science. The local authority acted quickly to appoint the interim executive board. The wide expertise of its individual members has proved most useful here. The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose and clearly sets out the actions the local authority will carry out to support the school.