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1 March 2012

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 Kevin Sheldrick, Her Majesty's Inspector and Judith Straw, Additional Inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 February 2012, 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 second 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed, but not in mathematics.

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 and Young People's Services for Stoke on Trent.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

March 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in 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 that 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 that 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 second monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 February 2012**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and incidents logs. They met with representatives of the interim executive board, the shadow governing body, a group of parents and carers, a representative from the local authority and spoke to school leaders, teachers individually and in groups, and individual students. They observed 31 staff teach 32 lessons and carried out brief visits to a series of other lessons.

#### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection in November 2011, three teachers of mathematics and one other teacher have left the school. Two teachers of mathematics have joined the school. Three teachers have returned from maternity leave, including the head of science and the head of PE, and one teacher has taken maternity leave. An assistant headteacher has relinquished this post to become the assistant head of science. An assistant headteacher has taken responsibility for pastoral support. The school is now fully staffed.

A shadow governing body is being formed to replace the interim executive board. The school has received confirmation of external funding to rebuild the older parts of the school.

#### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The legacy of underachievement in all subjects and especially in mathematics is being addressed by leaders and managers. Expectations have been raised of what students can achieve, particularly the most-able, and this is having a positive impact on achievement. The majority of staff uses data effectively to inform their planning so that students are better challenged. The school's tracking system indicates that students' progress is improving and therefore the percentage of students likely to achieve five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is expected to rise. The number of qualifications already achieved in English and mathematics and observations in lessons support this view.

Leaders and managers at all levels review the school's tracking data regularly to identify individuals and teaching groups who perform below, at or above expectations. Various interventions, including assertive mentoring, one-to-three tuition, compulsory catch-up sessions, as well as the provision of the necessary revision materials are helping students to gain lost ground and reach the challenging targets set by the school. There are good signs of success, especially for the groups of students that the school has targeted, namely those of higher ability, those known to be entitled to free school meals and those with disabilities and special educational needs.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 – good.

## **The quality of teaching**

Well-conceived and targeted strategies for improving the quality of teaching are being implemented. The proportion of good or better teaching has improved. Some lessons seen were outstanding and inadequate teaching has almost been eliminated.

Teachers are much better at matching the work to the needs of the students. Less time is spent on superficial learning and more opportunities are provided for developmental work that encourages deeper learning. For example, in a Year 7 geography lesson, students not only studied the types of volcanoes, but also the detail of how they are structured. Other recent improvements to lessons are seen in the regular use of well-chosen video clips, images and music which immediately engage students. Students are being offered many more choices about the ways in which they will learn and the infectious enthusiasm of many teachers inspires students to work hard. In the good lessons, teachers' plans take account of the needs of all abilities in the class. Students follow different learning tasks according to their ability to ensure that all make good progress. For example, in another Year 7 geography lesson, less-able students were encouraged to aim for higher levels of work; students were grouped according to ability, while others received targeted support. High-ability students were given harder work from the outset. However, in some lessons planning is not always aimed at all abilities in the class to ensure that all students make better than expected progress. For example, some learning objectives indicate that all students should get to the expected level and only a few beyond. This results in no better than satisfactory progress which is not sufficient to enable these students to make up lost ground.

Weaknesses in teaching over time result in some students remaining too passive. Nevertheless, occasions when lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour are now rare. Teachers are taking steps to develop students' communication skills further so that they can more effectively express their views.

The use of assessment to support learning continues to improve. Nearly all lessons now provide students with the opportunity to assess their own work and that of their peers. However, occasionally there is a lack of rigour in assessments because they are not linked strongly enough to assessment criteria. The quality of marking continues to be variable. Not all comments are followed up by students and some marking does not provide guidance on next steps, linked to students' targets. Some teachers are not setting high enough expectations for the presentation of work. Some departments set and mark homework to extend learning regularly, but this is not consistent across the school.

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



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

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The school has continued to improve and consolidate the behaviour and safety of students. Clear lines of accountability have been established that enable governors and senior leaders to monitor behaviour in the school. Senior leaders now systematically monitor day-to-day problems and seek solutions. Regular meetings are calendared to enable senior leaders to work with heads of year and establish early intervention and preventative work for students who are vulnerable or at risk of exclusion. The school has effectively enlisted the support of parents and carers to improve punctuality. Attendance clinics have been set up and management meetings monitor daily patterns and identify strategies to maintain acceptable levels of attendance and punctuality. As a result, behaviour has improved both in and out of lessons, attendance has risen to average levels, punctuality has improved and exclusions have reduced. The pastoral care of students has been improved through the new head of year system in order to strengthen the ethos of the school and to enhance the provision of students whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

Behaviour in the lessons observed was satisfactory. Most students are polite and courteous and are willing and confident to talk to visitors. Students report that behaviour has improved considerably and that they feel safe in school. Parents and carers interviewed agree that the behaviour in school has improved to acceptable levels. Their confidence in the school is growing and this is reflected in the increasing numbers of students projected to enter the school next year.

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

- Eradicate poor behaviour and ensure that students feel safe – good.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Monitoring and evaluation have continued to improve. The school is using a wider range of evidence to make judgements about the effectiveness of its provision. For instance, students' views and the school's increasingly reliable monitoring of student progress are ensuring that greater insights are gained of the effectiveness of teaching. Underperformance has been sensitively and effectively challenged. This is accelerating the pace of improvement. Improvement in the quality of teaching can be attributed largely to the intensive personal support provided for a number of less-effective teachers as well as professional development to move good teachers into the outstanding category.

There is also evidence of much better overall co-ordination of all the work the school does to promote better behaviour, particularly for those students at risk of exclusions. This is also contributing to the development of a more positive, caring ethos that is enhancing students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Communications to parents and carers are more regular and are being enhanced by a new user-friendly web-site. Plans are in place to

enhance the involvement of parents and carers further through more-effective consultation events. Effective steps have been taken to ensure that parents and carers and students understand the changes being made to the curriculum that will further enhance achievement.

Effective arrangements are in place to ensure a smooth future transition from the interim executive board arrangements to a new governing body. The interim executive board continues to be highly effective in the way it holds leaders to account. For instance, it has been instrumental in ensuring that rigorous and robust arrangements are being developed to meet the needs of students with disabilities and special educational needs as well as for those students at risk of exclusion. Senior leadership is going from strength to strength because a record of success is becoming evident. Senior leaders are demonstrating an ability to make short-term improvements but also to think longer term, for instance, with regard to the new building. There is a commendable willingness to be honest about the aspects that still require improvement. Senior leaders have developed a wide range of partnerships to meet the needs of students better, particularly those for whom their circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. Enhanced links with primary schools are aiding the transition of students to the school. The school continues to value the critical insights provided by the local authority and others that are external to the school.

Middle leadership is improving, although there is still more to do in ensuring that the school's policies are consistently and effectively implemented. Leadership in English, science and humanities has been particularly effectively in ensuring improvement. Staffing difficulties in mathematics have delayed improvements in this subject.

The procedures for safeguarding students were checked and found to meet the government's requirements.

Progress since the last monitoring 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. Reviews of overall provision and of targeted subjects have been useful in auditing strengths and weaknesses and targeting additional support. Subject leaders in mathematics and science have received additional coaching and the inclusion and access to learning teams have been used to good effect to broaden support for targeted students. An evaluation of the impact of external support by all partners involved has proved to be a useful tool for external providers to measure the effectiveness of their actions.