

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Martyn Berry
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Dear Mr Berry

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holbrook High School

Following my visit with Ruth Frith Additional Inspector to your academy on 7–8 November 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 academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2012. 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed to subject areas where appropriate mentoring and strong professional support can be assured.

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 and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012

- By September 2013, increase the pace of students' learning and progress to raise attainment to at least the national average by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good or better teaching
 - ensuring that assessment is accurate and lessons well planned so that all teaching challenges all students
 - consistently developing students' skills in literacy and numeracy in other subjects as well as mathematics and English.

- With the involvement of parents, carers and students, by September 2012, tackle issues that a significant number of them are concerned about by:
 - ensuring that all teachers implement behaviour policies consistently so that disruptive behaviour in class is eliminated
 - devising and implementing a structured homework policy for all subjects that includes how it is marked and clear guidance to ensure that homework consolidates classroom learning.

- By September 2012 improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - improving systems for observing lessons so that students' learning and progress are accurately monitored
 - systematically identifying and disseminating the very best practice in teaching and learning, for example that found in English and history
 - holding school leaders fully to account for the progress made by students
 - ensuring that all targets for performance management are challenging, clearly understood by those who are responsible and accountable for them, and set within a precise timeframe
 - ensuring that the governing body monitors all improvements rigorously, challenging where appropriate.

Special measures: monitoring of Holbrook High School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 7–8 November 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with academy leaders, teachers, groups of students and a representative of the governing body. They took account of three responses on Parent View and the results of a very recent parental survey the academy had undertaken.

Context

Since June 2012, an interim headteacher has been in post and the acting headteacher is now head of school. Senior leadership roles have been extended to include three new posts which focus on monitoring and developing teaching. These have been filled by internal promotions.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards are rising. Unvalidated results for GCSE examinations in 2012 show an increase in the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grade C or above. This is also true when these passes include mathematics and English. However, too few students made the progress expected of them in these two subjects, when their starting points are considered. Boys still make less progress than girls and the small number of students known to be eligible for additional government funding through the pupil premium made less progress than other groups in the academy. The proportion of students gaining the top grades is lower than would be expected, given the above average proportion of more-able students. Some of the small number of disabled students and those who have special educational needs make more progress than others because of the individual support they receive.

Improvements in assessment by teachers and rigorous moderation of the accuracy of the assessment by senior leaders have improved the quality of the data collected on how well students are progressing. This is ensuring that any students who are falling behind are supported quickly and more effectively. The data also show that progress in Years 7 and 8 is increasing in mathematics and English. Students are making at least satisfactory and often good progress in lessons.

Students read aloud confidently when given opportunities to do so. Their written work is better presented than at the previous visit, but many still make too many basic spelling errors. Often, this is as a result of rushing their work and teachers do not provide enough opportunities for them to develop oral skills, such as the ability to summarise what they have heard or develop and extend their answers. This is not

the case in all lessons and examples were seen of skilful questioning. For example, in a history lesson, the teacher prompted and coached students to develop their answers while maintaining the interest of the rest of the class.

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

- by September 2013, increase the pace of students' learning and progress to raise attainment to at least the national average – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and a greater proportion of teaching is good than at the last visit. Examples of outstanding practice were observed and students confirmed that lessons are more interesting.

The strengths of teaching include:

- teachers using their good subject knowledge to create interesting and energising starter activities which encourage learning from the very start of the lesson
- making good use of technology to make lessons more interesting and changes of activity smoother
- planning lessons with a good structure and a mix of activities to keep students engaged
- frequent checks using a range of techniques to ensure all students are making progress and know how to improve their work
- using interesting resources, such as ukuleles in music to develop musical skills and a range of everyday objects in art, to inspire different ideas
- providing opportunities to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and culture development.

Where progress in lessons is slower, this stems from some common issues. Teachers do not always set high enough expectations, especially for the most-able students in the class. All students are required to undertake the same tasks as others at the same pace. However, good practice was seen, such as in a mathematics lesson, where students were working on short sets of calculations presented on the interactive whiteboard with images to bring them to life. At the same time, each table had some additional and some more complex examples on a printed sheet which students could quickly tackle if they had finished before the teacher moved them on to the next set on the board.

As relationships are good in classrooms, some teachers confidently devise interesting and varied tasks using group work, independent research or involving movement around the classroom. Not all teachers are capitalising on this positive climate for learning. Sometimes it is the teacher who is doing most of the work.

Most teachers use technical language and support their students to do so, too. This makes a good contribution to their literacy skills. Across all subjects it is clear that students are being reminded about the need for accuracy in spelling and punctuation. Students need more support for speaking skills to be developed, but some outstanding practice was seen in a science lesson. Higher ability students in Year 11 were encouraged to propose examples of a world without diffraction and then question and challenge each other. The session was organised in such a way that the quality of students' speaking improved as the session progressed and the enjoyment was high, many not noticing that the lesson had ended and it was break time.

Homework tasks are being set and recorded regularly. Some parents, carers and students report that tasks are not sufficiently challenging, while others are pleased and have seen an improvement in the nature of the tasks being set. A clear assessment policy for assessing home learning is in place to encourage timely feedback and allow for a variety of tasks to be set. Regular checks are undertaken by senior leaders to ensure all marking is of a suitably high quality. In both of these aspects, practice is still variable.

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

- by September 2012, tackle the issues that parents, carers and students raised regarding the devising and implementing of a structured homework policy for all subjects that includes how it is marked and clear guidance that homework consolidates classroom learning – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students report that behaviour continues to improve and that disruption in lessons is now rare. The behaviour policy is more consistently applied and students appreciate the rewards that can be achieved by all. The refined reward system ensures a wide range of positive contributions to learning, the academy and the local community are celebrated. Strong support is provided for those students who have difficulty in managing their own behaviour.

Parents and carers are satisfied that their children are safe. Students demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in contexts such as the use of the internet. Bullying is rare and dealt with promptly and effectively. The academy has an exemplary system for monitoring the few instances that do occur, including tracking on a site plan the location of incidents over the course of a year. Opportunities have been extended for students to act as leaders.

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

- by September 2012, tackle the issues that parents, carers and students raised regarding the consistent implementation of behaviour policies so that disruptive behaviour in class is eliminated – satisfactory.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Changes are still being made to the leadership structure, but the improvements made so far have strengthened the capacity of the academy's leaders to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision. As a result, the interim headteacher and the head of school have a very accurate understanding of the strengths and remaining weaknesses. They have a clear vision for the academy and have won the support of staff and students. The quality of leadership overall is still variable. New leaders are developing their skills as leaders of learning. They have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and good communication skills to allow them to offer helpful feedback. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving.

A major improvement is in the accuracy of assessment, which is allowing leaders to collect information on students' progress and use it to form an accurate understanding of the next priorities for improvement. Increasingly, this information is being shared and linked to other data on issues, such as behaviour and attendance. These data are not yet being used sufficiently by all subject leaders to evaluate work in their areas of responsibility or by some teachers when planning lessons.

Links with parents and carers are being developed through more regular and better quality communications. The academy guarantees a response to queries within 24 hours and recent surveys of parents and carers confirm greater satisfaction. Links with partner schools have been developed and extended. Middle leaders have benefitted from these links to share good practice.

Members of the governing body understand the remaining weaknesses and emerging strengths of the academy. They are undertaking training and self-evaluation to improve further their ability to challenge and support. They are aware of the need to develop parental engagement and, as a result, have set up a well-attended parent forum.

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

- by September 2012 improve leadership and management, including governance – satisfactory.

External support

The academy has benefited from the support of partner schools to share and develop middle leaders and the accuracy of assessment. External evaluation has been commissioned which has provided a useful interim overview of the progress being made.