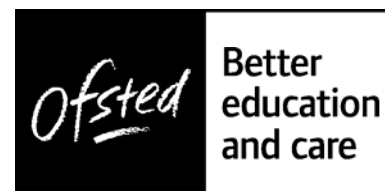


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Mr B Jordan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jordan

Implementation of Bebington High Sports College's Sixth-Form Action Plan

Following the visit of Mrs J Jones HMI and Mrs M Buckingham HMI to the sixth form of your school on 9 and 10 May 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the sixth form was designated as inadequate. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the students' standards of attainment and their progress, the quality of education; the leadership and management of the sixth form; and the progress that has been made in implementing the sixth-form action plan.

The school's action plan for the sixth form is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses.

The weakness outlined in the second paragraph of the note of the inspection findings should be addressed and amendments prepared by the second monitoring inspection.

The LEA's statement of action is weak.

The LEA is being asked to submit a revised statement of action within 25 working days of the monitoring inspection (15 June).

The sixth form has made limited progress since being designated as inadequate.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education and Cultural Services for

Wirral, and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

cc: chair of governors
LEA
LSC

IMPLEMENTATION OF BEBINGTON HIGH SPORTS COLLEGE'S SIXTH-FORM ACTION PLAN

Findings of the first monitoring inspection since the sixth form became designated as inadequate

During the visit, nine lessons or parts of lessons and one registration session were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, an assistant headteacher, an acting assistant headteacher, the director of sport, the head of sixth form, two sixth-form tutors, groups of Year 11 pupils and sixth-form students, the chair of governors, an educational consultant, two representatives from the LEA, and a representative from the local LSC. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with students, and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, his personal assistant, an acting assistant headteacher, the head of sixth form, the chair of the governing body, a representative from the LEA and a representative from the local LSC.

One section of the school's detailed action plan addresses all the areas for improvement in the sixth form, with useful cross references where relevant to whole-school issues. Although some whole-school actions are included, more could be made of the role of assessment in raising standards in the sixth form; for example, its use in curriculum and lesson planning, the tracking of students' progress, and in promoting the students' involvement in their learning. The actions are generally clearly defined although some, particularly those relating to teachers' professional development, are implied through statements in the columns detailing resources and strategies for monitoring. The school might usefully compile a matrix of the develop needs of staff in relation to the implementation of the action plan. During the inspection, in response to discussion with HMI, the headteacher clarified who has the overall responsibility for each area for improvement and whether the dates within the plan represented the beginning or completion of actions. However, some dates do not reflect the necessary urgency, especially those relating to teaching. While the plan includes appropriate mechanisms for monitoring, it does not state clearly how, when, and by whom the effectiveness of the actions will be evaluated. There are a number of appropriate quantitative success criteria, but few interim targets to help gauge progress.

The LEA's commentary follows DfES guidance but its statement of action is insufficiently detailed. When assessing the scope for closure, the LEA provides no details of surplus places that are available in better performing local schools, speaking instead of the potential impact of closure of the sixth form on the school's roll if it were to become the only 11-16 secondary school in the area. The LEA does not explicitly cite a target date for the recovery of the sixth form, but suggests that the school's plan should result in "recovery to a healthy position by September 2007". This date is not acceptable, being nearly three years after the school's section 10 inspection instead of the required two years, and should be reviewed to reflect greater urgency. Although the LEA outlines which partners are to contribute

to the school's improvement, it gives no details of specific actions by the LEA to address the weaknesses in the sixth form: this is unsatisfactory. Brief mention is made of the involvement of the LEA's subject inspectors, but the school reports that there has been no input to the sixth-form provision since the inspection in October 2004. In its revised statement, the LEA should explain clearly what action it will take to support the sixth form, including resource implications, and provide quantified targets for evaluating its own effectiveness.

The school is of average size but its sixth form is small, currently 27 students in Year 12 and nine in Year 13. It attained specialist sports college status in 2001. The school serves an area of some economic and social disadvantage. About twice the average proportion of pupils aged 11-16 are eligible for free school meals and, in the sixth form, the proportion is three times the national average. The LEA operates a selective system in this part of the Wirral: there are two single-gender grammar schools in close proximity to the school, and all the other secondary schools in the area have sixth forms. There is also a sixth-form college and a general further education college within easy travelling distance. Consequently, students have a wide choice of post-16 provision in the local area.

The standards attained at AVCE/A level in 2004 were well below average when compared with all sixth forms in maintained schools, but represented an improvement upon the 2003 results. Seventeen students sat advanced-level examinations; the pass rate rose to 74.4 per cent, but remains much lower than the national figure. The students' average points score rose from 93.8 to 126.5. The pass rate of the Year 12 students at AS level rose to 67 per cent, but there was significant variation in the performances of different subjects. The students achieved most strongly in art, English literature and sociology, and poorly in biology and physical education. Few students attained the highest grades.

The quality of teaching was good in two of the nine lessons, satisfactory in five, and unsatisfactory in two. A general strength of the teaching was the good relationships between the teachers and the students. Other aspects of teaching varied widely, for example the quality of planning. In the better lessons, the teachers were enthusiastic, had high expectations of the students' achievement and the contributions they would make, and had a clear focus upon standards. They planned carefully and set clear learning objectives. They used questioning skilfully to probe and build the students' understanding, rephrasing and using follow-up questions to develop the students' responses further. Some teachers' marking provided useful feedback to the students.

There were a number of weaknesses in the teaching, including in some lessons that were satisfactory overall. The planning did not take the students' different needs and abilities sufficiently into account. Some lessons proceeded at a slow pace. The teachers too often dominated the discussion, generally restricting their questions to those that were closed, thereby limiting the students' involvement. They expected too little of the students and did not promote their independent learning skills, for example through taking notes or by annotating photocopied materials. Where the

students' understanding was not checked adequately, errors and misconceptions went unaddressed.

The quality of learning lagged slightly behind the quality of teaching. It was good in one lesson, satisfactory in five, and unsatisfactory in three. Although the students want to do well, many were passive and were reticent about asking for help. In part, this is related to their weak recall of previous learning, which in turn is linked to the effectiveness of their independent study. They were given few opportunities to work collaboratively.

The students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning were good in three lessons and satisfactory in six. The students have positive attitudes, and were willing and cooperative in lessons, although lacking in confidence. Some of the students' folders were, however, poorly organised. The students' rate of attendance from September 2004 to April 2005 was 91.4 per cent.

The headteacher took up post in September 2004. The previous headteacher and several of the senior management team left the school at the end of the previous academic year. Permanent appointments to some senior positions were not made and consequently four senior managers are currently in acting roles. A new permanent head of sixth form was appointed from within the school: he also assumed responsibility from September 2004. While committed to and supportive of the headteacher, the managers vary in their effectiveness and influence. Some lack experience of senior leadership and management, while others have not benefited from strong role models in the past; these factors have increased the range of challenges faced by the headteacher. In setting the scene for improving the quality of provision across the school, a limited focus has been given to the sixth form. In particular, the slowness in producing the action plan and the lack of specific actions during that period have impeded its progress: this is now recognised by some senior staff.

The headteacher has had a positive impact upon the school's ethos: he has a high-profile presence around the school. The Year 11 pupils and sixth-form students spoke of his willingness to talk with them and seek their views, and of the improvements, for instance in behaviour, that have resulted from his leadership. The staff are also showing a willingness to engage with actions to bring improvement. These are important steps. However, with regard to the sixth form, progress needs to be more rapid.

The LEA supported the school in the development of the action plan but has subsequently had little involvement in the day-to-day work of the sixth form, although it has provided subject-specific support in several areas within the main school. It has not monitored the quality of the sixth-form provision or progress against the action plan. During the inspection, the LEA's representatives expressed a clear commitment to developing a coherent range of strategies to bring improvement within the sixth form and across the school. Nevertheless, the impact of the LEA's support to date has been limited.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

Area 1: raise standards at the ends of Years 12 and 13 by improving academic targets, setting and monitoring

The school has set target minimum grades for each student based on their attainment at GCSE. However, it is not clear which target relates to which subject. The targets have been shared with the students, their parents, the subject teachers and form tutors, and are recorded on the students' recent reports alongside grades for their current performance. This work has increased the emphasis on standards and, although requiring refinement, is laying the early foundations for tracking the students' progress and analysing their performance. The school has appointed a data manager who takes up post in September 2005, after which the staff will receive training on the use of target minimum grades.

Assessment practices are variable across the school; for example, a grade of C carries alternative meanings when awarded by different teachers. There is no whole-school policy or guidance on assessment or marking. Some staff share assessment criteria with the students and were clear about the students needed to do to attain a particular standard; others do not. Apart from work in art, which might usefully be annotated, there were no displays of sixth-form work within subject areas.

No-one has a clear overview of the students' likely performance in the 2005 examinations, despite the recent sixth-form reports. Moreover, the 2004 results have not been analysed in depth to establish why some subjects performed more strongly than others and how that information might be used to guide curriculum planning. However, the school is better placed to carry out such an analysis following this summer's examinations.

Progress on this area is limited.

Area 2: improve the quality of teaching

Too little has been done to address this area. The senior managers have not monitored the teaching to identify strengths and weaknesses. Very recently, an educational consultant, funded through the Leadership Incentive Grant, has begun to observe teaching in the sixth form and has provided feedback including areas for improvement to staff on a private and individual basis. The headteacher reports that this developmental work has been positively received. However, no systematic approach to improving the quality of teaching has been planned.

Progress on this area is limited.

Area 3:

- **modify the curriculum so it meets the needs of all students;**
- **improve the students' basic skills such as information and communication technology (ICT) and the capacity for independent study;** and
- **improve advice and guidance to prospective sixth-form students so that they are directed to appropriate courses in which they are likely to succeed whether the courses are at school or elsewhere**

Currently the school offers mainly level 3 courses over 2 years. A review of the 14-19 curriculum has begun, led by two acting members of the senior management team. The forum for discussion of this development is through the subject co-ordinators' meetings, thus ensuring the involvement of middle managers. The focus is on broadening the curriculum offer at levels 2 and 3 with more vocational options. Several new courses are being offered, although BTEC accreditation has not yet been gained. These useful developments have the potential of better suiting the students' needs. Other proposals include supervised private study time, and extension of sixth-form access to ICT and library facilities. Although an audit of training needs has been carried out, the full implications of a broader curriculum have not been analysed. There is an imperative to speed up progress to ensure curriculum planning and suitably trained staff are in place for the autumn term.

A curriculum model has been prepared for 2005-06 and prospective numbers of students and viability of proposed courses have been analysed. Four hours per level 3 subject is planned for Year 12 students, which is low given the likely GCSE attainment of many prospective students. A weekly lesson in personal and social development (PSD) and religious education is also included in the model. There is uncertainty, however, about whether the provision for key skills is to be developed through discrete courses, subjects, or lessons in PSD. The school has given insufficient attention to this area and its relationship to improving teaching and learning. The students have, however, received a session to develop their study skills in preparation for their examinations. This year, for the first time, the students have benefited from work experience; the school intends to build on this in the future.

The school has worked hard to ensure that the Year 11 pupils are well informed about post-16 options. They have been interviewed and advised on an individual basis by senior staff who have discussed their predicted grades and course preferences. This complements the ongoing careers programme within the school. The pupils have welcomed these interviews. They are clear about the general entry requirement for level 3 courses, five GCSE A* to C grades. However, the school should review whether grade C is an adequate prerequisite for studying some level 3 courses. Other initiatives have included sixth-form subject taster days and a careers festival. Much, however, remains to be done to address the pupils' and parents' perceptions of the values and appropriateness of vocational courses.

The students spoke positively about the support given by tutors and subject teachers. Data is available to tutors on the students' prior attainment to inform discussions. The tutors have a role in guidance through updating records of achievement and are using the progress file, for example during registration and the fortnightly PSD sessions and, more informally, one-to-one with students. However, tutors and teachers have yet to receive training for their planned enhanced role in academic guidance.

Progress on this area is reasonable.

Area 4: improve leadership and management of the sixth form at all levels of management in the school and ensure staff and governors are well aware of what best practice is in a modern sixth form

The actions to address this area for improvement are behind schedule. Plans to review the job descriptions of the head of sixth form and his line manager have been put on hold while the headteacher establishes a new leadership structure for September 2005. Current job descriptions do not clearly define roles and responsibilities or lines of accountability.

At present there are very few arrangements for monitoring the sixth-form provision, and no-one is being held properly to account for its quality and consistency. Moreover, there is too rosy a view of the quality of teaching: too little emphasis has been placed upon the impact of the teaching on the progress made by the students within lessons and over time.

The governing body is committed to the school but is in the early stages of developing its role of support and challenge to the school. There is a full complement of governors and, since the inspection, an experienced governor has been elected as chair. A calendar of committee meetings has been drawn up and proper arrangements made for taking minutes. However, the governing body has not established how it will monitor the implementation of the sixth-form action plan. Last term's meeting of the full governing body was shortly after the submission of the plan. The headteacher's two reports to the governing body to date have not included the sixth-form provision; this is unsatisfactory.

Progress on this area is limited.