



23 June 2005

Miss E Merryman
Headteacher
Trentham High School
Allerton Road
Trentham
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire ST4 8PQ

Dear Miss Merryman

Implementation of Trentham High School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 June 2005, with my colleague Sue Hands, Additional Inspector, we write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools where the section 10 inspection indicated that the school was underachieving. You will recall that the aims of the visit were to assess the progress made in addressing and eliminating underachievement and meeting the targets given in the action plan. We also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit we inspected 20 lessons or part lessons; attended two registration periods; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with yourself and nominated staff on the causes and areas of underachievement. We also examined a range of the pupils' work and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, we made the following observations to you, the chair of the governing body, two members of the senior leadership team and a representative from the LEA.

The school's improvement plan is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. All the areas identified in the inspection report of February 2004 are addressed in the plan, but it under-emphasises the strategies to improve the pupils' attainment and progress in subjects identified as a cause for concern. Few of the success criteria are quantified and some are too general to be useful. Not all actions have timescales against which to measure their progress or assess their impact. Often

the same individuals are responsible for both implementing and monitoring the progress of actions and it is not clear who is responsible for evaluating each action.

In the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 3 national tests, the pupils' results showed standards to be broadly average in science and mathematics and above average in English when compared to all schools; they were broadly average when compared to similar schools. Results at Key Stage 3 overall show that the pupils make the progress expected based on their prior attainment at Key Stage 2.

The 2004 GCSE results showed that the Year 11 pupils' progress was well below national expectations based on their prior attainment. The proportion of the pupils gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE fell slightly from 49 to 47 per cent. Although this was broadly in line with national figures, it was well below that expected when compared to schools where a similar proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The pupils made significantly less progress in English and mathematics than in most other subjects. Boys significantly underperformed compared to girls.

The school's analysis of data is thorough and identifies differences in performance by subject and key stage; the relative performance of girls and boys is also considered. This information has been shared with staff and training has been provided to develop their understanding of the data. However, the data is not always used effectively to inform lesson planning through the provision of activities which meet the needs of all the pupils and provide an appropriate level of challenge to the more able pupils; consequently the use of data to eliminate underachievement is limited.

Standards in lessons were broadly in line with national expectations. Where teaching was good, pupils usually made good progress and standards were at least satisfactory. Literacy skills varied widely; nevertheless the development of these was good in some lessons. Speaking and listening skills were developed well where lesson plans allowed for paired or group discussion.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory overall. Teaching was very good in one lesson, good in nine, satisfactory in seven and unsatisfactory in three lessons. The pupils' progress was satisfactory or better in 17 of the 20 lessons including five in which it was good or better. However, the number of lessons in which the pupils made good progress was too low to raise levels of achievement significantly. In the best lessons learning objectives were shared in a way that the pupils could understand. These lessons were well planned, with a variety of activities and a brisk pace. Pupils were actively engaged in their learning through collaborative work in pairs or small groups and this helped to develop independent learning skills. Other features of these lessons were good relationships between pupils and between pupils and their teachers, well established classroom routines, work which met the needs of all the pupils and effective behaviour management; consequently most pupils made at least satisfactory progress.

In some of the satisfactory lessons there was a fine balance of strengths and weaknesses. Some of the more able pupils were not challenged sufficiently in lessons where all pupils were doing the same work. Tolerance of inappropriate behaviours, particularly low level persistent chatter, limited the progress of some pupils and was a barrier to raising attainment. In the unsatisfactory lessons the pupils did not do enough work. Activities were dull and failed to capture the interest of some pupils or retain that of others; the pupils' progress was unsatisfactory.

The school is attempting to encourage greater use of information and communication technology (ICT) by providing additional facilities and staff training. From September, each subject will be required to identify areas which will be delivered through ICT in schemes of work. A start has been made on collecting portfolios of evidence of work using ICT across the curriculum in Key Stage 3. During the inspection, the use of ICT in lessons varied in quality and depended on the interests and skills of individual teachers.

In 17 of the 20 lessons, the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils were satisfactory or better; they were good or better in 11. The pupils responded well to lessons which engaged their interest and the unsatisfactory behaviour was usually a reflection of unsatisfactory or dull teaching. Occasionally, the pupils were tolerant of teaching which did not enthral or challenge them and they behaved better than the teaching deserved. The behaviour of the pupils as they move around the school was broadly satisfactory, although there were pockets of boisterousness. Behaviour had markedly improved since the last inspection. Most of the pupils were polite and courteous to adults, including visitors, and generally their relationships with each other were good.

Attendance is good. At 93.6 per cent for the last school year it is well above the national average for all schools. Authorised absence is lower than the national average and unauthorised absence is higher. This is accounted for by the school's rigour in applying strict rules for authorisation. Punctuality to school is satisfactory and improving. There is occasional lateness to lessons which is not always sufficiently challenged.

Fixed-term exclusions are falling. The inclusion promotion centre, which is used for internal exclusion, has helped to reduce the numbers. However, it is currently out of commission as a result of recruitment difficulties. Permanent exclusions have been avoided through the use of the LEA-wide managed transfer system.

The headteacher has worked hard to secure appropriate staffing for September 2005 and a number of new appointments have been made. Decisions to modify the Key Stage 4 curriculum are well considered to better meet the needs of all the pupils. Applied GCSE and worked-based learning this year, have given a greater

choice to pupils at Key Stage 4 and some of this provision will be expanded in September 2005. Further vocational provision is planned for September 2006 and has been appropriately staged to ensure training and development needs are fully met. The headteacher has brought clarity to the roles of senior managers, although she is not holding them to account with sufficient rigour for their work in monitoring and evaluation those actions identified in the school's improvement plan for which they are responsible. Whole school training has been focussed on the areas for improvement including behaviour management, the use of data to raise achievement and strategies to develop teaching and learning. A lesson observation programme, supported by training provided by the LEA, has been established for all middle and senior leaders. The profile of the quality of teaching produced by the school is more generous than the quality found by HMI.

Too many actions are being progressed simultaneously with insufficient attention to prioritising them or evaluating their impact. Overall, systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of actions are underdeveloped; consequently the school has an over generous view of its progress in a number of key areas of work. The updating of key policies, such as teaching and learning, assessment and behaviour, are planned and work is underway, but progress is not fast enough.

Senior leaders have delegated more responsibility to the subject leaders for implementing and evaluating the impact of actions at individual subject level. However, they are not holding them to account through rigorous monitoring. The quality of departmental action plans is variable and is unsatisfactory overall.

The LEA has provided an appropriate range of targeted support for the school in consultation with the headteacher. The LEA's analysis of the school's results is thorough; however their evaluation of the rate of progress against the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report of February 2004 is over generous. It is envisaged that support will be offered until the school has fully addressed the causes of underachievement.

Evaluation of Progress:

The school is making limited progress towards raising pupils' attainment and eliminating underachievement.

In relation to the action plan and the impact of the actions taken reasonable progress has been made in addressing the key tasks which relate to the school's underachievement.

This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors and the local education authority.
This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

CATHRYN KIRBY
HM Inspector of Schools

cc chair of governors
LEA