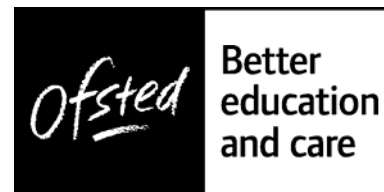


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Mr N Browne
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Browne

Implementation of North Bromsgrove High School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr C J Redman HMI and Mr D Simpson HMI to your school on 27 and 28 June 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 sixth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. It was a 'light touch' inspection with the prime focus to assess improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, and the pupils' attitudes and behaviour, as key elements to further progress in implementing the action plan.

The school has made reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection, and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director for Educational Services for Worcestershire. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF NORTH BROMSGROVE HIGH SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the sixth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit 24 parts of lessons, two registration sessions and an assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, nominated staff, the chair of governors, a group of Year 9 pupils and a representative of the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Only the work of Year 9 and one Year 12 group was inspected as Year 10 pupils were on work experience and Years 11 and 13 had completed their public examinations. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the headteacher designate, the chair of the governing body and two representatives from the LEA.

Standards in lessons varied widely. Some of the higher attaining pupils worked at levels well above average, but too many were working at levels that were about average; some lower attaining pupils worked at levels well below that which is typical for their age.

The quality of learning was satisfactory or better in 17 lessons, but good in only eight and very good in one. The pupils were given more opportunities to participate actively in lessons. Some of the pupils made good use of these opportunities to work co-operatively with others, discuss problems and answer the teachers' questions; a few pupils asked their own questions to clarify and extend their understanding; however, too many of the pupils were content to be passive unless asked questions directly or given tasks to complete. The quality of listening had improved; nevertheless, it varied widely and remained below average overall. Speaking also varied, but too few of the pupils had developed a confident speaking style or constructed sentences with ease and used technical language correctly. Their weak vocabulary was also apparent in their writing, too much of which included spelling and grammatical errors. Too few of the pupils solved problems confidently. Often they were aware of the information they required and understood the problem but could not construct a solution; this was apparent in both academic and practical contexts. As a result, too many of the pupils were over dependent on adult help to make adequate progress. The pupils were aware of the advice provided for them during lessons and in marking, but they were not always using this adequately to raise the standard of their work. In only three lessons did unsatisfactory behaviour affect the quality of learning. Although aspects of learning had improved, too many pupils had yet to take adequate responsibility for their learning.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 18 lessons; it was good in nine and very good in four, but unsatisfactory in five and poor in one. Aspects of the teaching had improved. The plenary sessions were better planned and in most lessons were a good review of how much the pupils had learnt. A greater variety of activities was being used to involve the pupils actively in learning. The best lessons were characterised by: exposition that was interesting, held the pupils' attention and was delivered at a good pace; questioning that required the pupils to give explanations and justifications; very good relationships with the pupils; work that was well structured and suitably challenging; and high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and the standard of their work.

Where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the predominant characteristic was of unchallenging or poorly presented work that failed to gain the pupils' interest and too often led to incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour.

In several lessons, the teachers had planned worthwhile activities but did not structure them adequately to support the pupils' successful completion of the tasks. For example, some small group discussions were not satisfactorily structured, questioning was to individual pupils rather than using strategies to involve the whole class and insufficient structure was given to help lower attaining pupils solve problems. Too often the pupils were given the answer to their questions when they could not solve problems rather than strategies to identify the answer for themselves.

The pupils' behaviour in lessons had improved. The pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning were satisfactory or better in over eight out of ten lessons and good or better in half. The pupils responded positively to: opportunities to take responsibility; well structured activities which enabled them to learn from each other; and tasks which were relevant and well tailored to their needs. However, in too many lessons, the pupils were lethargic, indifferent to learning, and, when teaching was insufficiently challenging, bored and occasionally disruptive.

The rate of attendance for this academic year is 92 per cent which is an improvement on last year and is broadly in line with the national median. Punctuality is not good enough; over 40 pupils arrived after the start of registration on the second morning of the visit and the start of two lessons was disrupted by lateness.

The behaviour of the pupils around the school was good. A significant staff presence fostered good order and the pupils were clear about how they were expected to conduct themselves. The number of days lost to exclusions has

reduced this year to 177 and has continued to decline rapidly each term. There have been no permanent exclusions this year.

Leadership and management have continued to improve. In the past year, the headteacher has provided high quality leadership which has helped to restore the teachers' self-confidence and stimulate the proper debate about professional issues such as teaching, learning and behaviour. He has provided direction and support to the teachers' work, particularly their efforts to improve the quality of their teaching. He has crucially defined the quality of teaching to which all staff should aspire and the behaviour expected of all pupils. Under his guidance, the quality of senior and middle management has improved markedly. Communications between all levels of management are better, bringing about a greater coherence to the school's efforts to provide a better education for the pupils. These improvements are recognised and celebrated by both staff and pupils.

Governance has improved. The governors have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have supported the school's development well.

The LEA continues to provide the school with good advice and to secure key staff to support senior management. Its monitoring has been good and has provided a realistic view of the school's improvement.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: improve the quality of teaching, especially in English, mathematics, French, German and ICT, by:

- **ensuring that the work is not too easy for pupils so they are interested in their lessons;**
- **making a concerted effort to improve standards of literacy and numeracy;**
- **making sure teachers are aware of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and how these needs may be met;**
- **making better use of homework**

Monitoring of teaching and learning has continued appropriately; the LEA has helped to develop the observation skills of subject leaders and senior managers have continued with a programme of lesson observations. This has helped the school evolve an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and to focus support where it is required most. In some areas, for example, music and business studies, the teaching has shown marked improvement, but in mathematics and religious education, the improvement has not been good enough. The professional training, which has focused on learning styles, has enabled the teachers to use activities that have helped many of the

pupils to access lessons more effectively, but this improvement has been inconsistent across the school.

Progress with the key issue has been reasonable.

Key Issue 2: improve the leadership and management of the school by:

- **instigating ways of checking up on the quality of teaching, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, using the strengths to put the weaknesses right;**
- **analysing data on pupils' and students' performance and using the conclusions to inform teachers of how well they are doing and where they need to improve and to set the school's priorities for development;**
- **ensuring governors carry out their duties of monitoring and evaluation properly and meeting all statutory requirements**

The quality of leadership and management has been evaluated above.

Progress with the key issue has been good.

Key Issue 3: get the school onto a secure financial footing by:

- **determining the exact state of the finances;**
- **drawing up plans to reduce the deficit budget;**
- **working out how much it costs to operate the curriculum;**
- **making efficient use of the resources available, especially teachers;**
- **using finance to support the school's immediate priorities**

The budget deficit at the end of 2004/5 was larger than expected at £295,000 because the school included a number of outstanding anomalies. However, the exact position of the finances is better understood; the key features that cause most risk to a healthy budget have been recognised with appropriate action taken to control the budget. As a result, financial management has improved markedly. In agreement with the LEA, the school has set a budget with a substantial deficit of £200,000 for the current year, which is necessary in order to protect the curriculum for the existing pupils while the school carries out a plan to reduce its spending substantially over the next three years. However, it is difficult to see how the long-standing deficit can be radically reduced without a significant increase in pupil numbers, which is unlikely. The deficit and uncertainty over future finances continue to affect the school's strategic planning.

Progress with this key issue is reasonable.

Key Issue 4: improve the curriculum by:

- **increasing the amount of lessons taught each week;**
- **reducing the number of classes that are split between teachers;**
- **providing enough time for the teaching of citizenship, physical education and religious education;**
- **ensuring that all pupils are taught sufficient ICT**

No further evidence was collected on this key issue.

Key Issue 5: improve the quality of the data on pupils and students by:

- **ensuring that work is properly marked;**
- **grades are systematically recorded;**
- **outcomes are shared between teachers so that a full picture of a pupil or student emerges**

Teachers have a good understanding of the principles of the school's marking policy. Some teachers are assessing the pupils' work effectively, recognising strengths and accurately identifying areas for development. The pupils speak positively about the support they receive in English and science. However, the pupils are not attending sufficiently to their teachers' comments in order to improve their work.

Imaginative training has helped middle managers to establish a more consistent understanding of prior attainment information and the school's target-setting procedures. Efficient and well integrated systems to gather data regularly with regard to progress and attitudes are valued by the teachers and provide a good framework to address underachievement and celebrate good progress. The information sent to parents each term is being processed more rapidly and consequently provides a more up-to-date profile of their child's performance. Developments are well in hand to enhance the tutors' central role in monitoring the overall profile of their pupils' learning from the start of next academic year.

Progress is good.

Key Issue 6: improve the behaviour of pupils by:

- **ensuring that the new procedures for controlling behaviour are adhered to;**
- **providing training for teachers in managing behaviour in the classroom**

Data concerning the behaviour of the pupils is more systematically gathered, monitored and evaluated. The information is used to identify pupils whose behaviour is unsatisfactory and to take appropriate escalating action, including fixed term exclusions for those who repeatedly disrupt the learning of others; the staff commented positively on these developments. Pupil questionnaires and

features of the school's work, such as the use of planners, are frankly evaluated and used to identify areas for future improvement. Helpfully, lesson observations include judgements on behaviour which are fed back to the pupils; however, the opportunity to evaluate and report on key features of the pupils' attitudes to, and the effectiveness of, learning has yet to be implemented.

Underpinning the progress in this key issue is the school's commitment to establishing clear expectations that the pupils will take an active and responsible part in their learning. Although inconsistencies in the quality of the management of low-order disruptive behaviour by teachers remain, standards of conduct have improved and the pupils themselves speak favourably about the better behaviour.

Progress is good.

Sixth form

Too little evidence about the sixth form was collected on this inspection to make secure judgements about the five key issues for improvement.