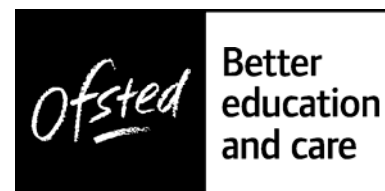


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5 July 2005

Mrs L Copley
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Copley

Implementation of Rawthorpe High School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Andrew Bennett HMI, Linden Phillips HMI and Joan Arnold, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 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. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

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

The school is permitted to appoint one newly qualified teacher in the science department.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF RAWTHORPE HIGH SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 30 lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and a tutorial session were inspected. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the acting headteacher, the headteacher designate, the deputy headteacher, other senior and middle managers and support staff with responsibilities for the key issues, the community manager, the chair of governors, two representatives from the LEA and members of the school council. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the executive headteacher, the acting headteacher, the headteacher designate, the deputy headteacher, the assessment manager, the community manager, the bursar, the chair of the governing body, and two representatives from the LEA.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there have been significant changes affecting the leadership and management of the school. A new headteacher will take up post on 1 September. In April, the LEA's Director of Lifelong Learning withdrew delegation of financial and staffing matters to the governing body, in accordance with section 51, schedule 15 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. This decision was taken following continuing difficulties experienced by the executive headteacher and acting headteacher in obtaining governors' approval for improvements to the school's ICT system and for establishing a viable staffing structure in view of projected cutbacks to funding. Several members of the teaching staff have resigned, or are on long-term sickness absence, and two members of the support staff have left the school. Following her appointment, the headteacher designate has been involved in discussions with the executive and acting headteachers to develop a suitable and cost-effective curriculum that can be sustained within the financial resources likely to be available to the school. A new staffing structure has been approved by the LEA. An AST in English has been appointed for September, together with a school sports co-ordinator and new teachers of science and mathematics. The executive headteacher's school will contribute to the professional development programme for a newly qualified teacher in science, and the acting headteacher will continue to assist with improving teaching and learning and with the induction of the new headteacher in the autumn term.

Standards seen during this inspection were generally below age-related expectations although some pupils in higher sets attained standards broadly in line with what would be expected and in a mixed ability Year 8 music lesson, pupils

were attaining above average standards. Although staff are increasingly aware of how data can inform planning and target setting, many teachers' expectations remain too low, so that pupils are often unaware of what they might achieve and, crucially, of specific ways in which they might improve the standard of their work. There is still insufficient focus on performance criteria in much of the marking and too few references to standards of attainment in lessons.

The pupils made at least satisfactory progress in 18 of the 30 lessons inspected; progress was good in six lessons and very good in one. One of the greatest challenges for the school remains the absence of a positive learning ethos among the majority of the pupils. Few pupils show obvious enthusiasm for their work or are proud of what they achieve, except where the quality of teaching is significantly better than in the majority of lessons: lack of interest, or at best compliance, are common responses. The pupils respect well established routines and strive to meet high expectations in lessons where they know that the teacher makes a whole-hearted effort on their behalf. In weaker lessons, and even in some where the teaching is broadly satisfactory, a narrow range of teaching styles and dull resources do not inspire the pupils to make the considerable effort needed to raise their levels of attainment.

In 23 lessons, the teaching was at least satisfactory; in six of those lessons, it was good and in two it was very good. Features of the best teaching were: effective three-part lessons, in which the starter was crisp and relevant, the main body of the lesson comprised engaging and varied tasks, and the end-of-lesson plenary was a genuine dialogue between teacher and pupils; tasks that moved at a smart pace with a clear goal for each; targeted, probing questions that allowed teachers to accurately assess the progress made by pupils and sometimes encouraged pupils to develop their own evaluative skills; high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and genuine praise for their commitment to achieving well; and a willingness to give responsibility to the pupils and to develop their independent learning skills. The improved quality of lesson plans reported in the previous note of visit has been sustained but there are still too many lessons in which the quality of the teaching does not match the quality of the paper plan. Even in best lessons, there was not always sufficient differentiation or challenge in the work to lift the quality of the teaching to the very good or excellent categories. Many of the broadly satisfactory lessons shared weaknesses such as: too much direction and intervention by the teacher, so that the pupils felt little ownership of their work; too little adaptation of tasks for the needs of different pupils; and inadequate use of assessment opportunities, so that there was insufficient awareness of current standards and ways to improve them. In many classrooms, there was a high proportion of adults to pupils; while some teaching assistants supported pupils' learning well, others made little discernible contribution and were sometimes ineffective in helping to manage behaviour. In some unsatisfactory lessons, the teachers' demands and

expectations were far too low; this led to boredom and poor behaviour among the pupils. Other weak teaching was characterised by poor planning and casual delivery so that behaviour was poor from the outset and any progress was almost incidental. The school has known for some time that many pupils are held back by weak literacy skills; literacy across the curriculum is now one of several standing items on the agenda for meetings of the curriculum managers' group. However, little positive impact on classroom practice is yet evident; this is an area for development that might usefully be considered as a focus for the broader community of the school.

At the time of the last monitoring visit, pupils' attitudes and behaviour had deteriorated and new systems had not had sufficient time to make an appreciable difference. During this visit improvement was noticeable, particularly in standards of behaviour. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in 24 lessons, including 13 in which they were good or better in 13 (43 per cent). In the small number of lessons where behaviour was unsatisfactory, the work failed to capture pupils' interests; teachers did not set clear parameters for acceptable classroom routines or challenge inappropriate responses. In those lessons, there was often an undercurrent of off-task chatter; some pupils were surly or petulant, frequently interrupting the flow of lessons. Behaviour around the school is much improved. Pupils move more sensibly in the corridors; they are well behaved in the dining room at lunch time and Year 9 pupils displayed exemplary behaviour when attending morning assembly. Pupils generally show respect to adults and visitors in the school and are willing to help if asked. Numbers of exclusions have reduced from 48 in the autumn term to 19 in the current term. There have been only three permanent exclusions this school year but a large number of pupils are repeatedly excluded for fixed periods, many of whom are in Year 9.

The picture of pupils' attitudes towards their work is more complex. Where teaching is good and the work is relevant and interesting, the pupils respond positively. Members of the school council are proud of their school and feel that its bad reputation is unjust. Nevertheless, they are frustrated by the negative attitudes of a small but significant number of their peers whose lateness holds up the starts of lessons and whose low-level disruption takes up too much of the teachers' time and attention. Most pupils are non-committal about their work; they do as they are asked but show little overt enthusiasm, except for some practical activities.

The executive headteacher and the acting headteacher have continued to confront the challenge of stabilising the school and raising the aspirations of staff and pupils without pre-empting longer-term decisions that the new headteacher will wish to make. Firm action has been taken on a number of fronts, notably staffing, for example in clarifying issues arising from the previous lack of a coherent

management performance system. Having to cope with cover for absent staff, supporting weaknesses in middle management and establishing a calmer learning environment has meant that senior managers have too often assumed a fire-fighting rather than a strategic role. However, a significant development since the previous monitoring inspection has been the production of a three-year school improvement plan that sets clear short-term targets under each of the key issues together with appropriate whole school priorities that will both underpin progress with the key issues and move the school forward on a broader front. The contribution made by the community manager to this process has been impressive. The morale of some staff has been low during the past two years but current senior managers have worked hard to support them, for example through tighter disciplinary procedures and improved security around the school site, while still insisting on raising standards within the classroom. There is a palpable sense of optimism among many key staff, who see the possibility of a fresh start in September, buoyed by the appointment of a new headteacher, a full teaching complement and a revised structure to the curriculum and the school day.

The LEA's recent involvement with the school has been particularly helpful in clarifying funding and in establishing budgetary guidelines for the coming year. Minutes of regular monthly meetings between LEA officers and the school's senior managers show a welcome, intensive focus on securing structures that are effective and sustainable and that have the potential to drive improvement. Consultancy support is now concentrated in specific areas where it will make a difference, for example, strategic planning in the mathematics department and developing literacy skills in science. Some staff report that they value the detailed written feedback of lesson observations now provided for them by the LEA. The LEA is supporting joint meetings with the headteachers of other local schools to establish shared expectations and aspirations to enhance progression and continuity between the primary and secondary phases within the community.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: raise attainment in both key stages

More systematic collation of pupil-level data at both key stages has led to a greater security in the information they provide. All departments now receive summary information about pupils which includes details of prior attainment together with external data indicating pupils' expected attainment. For each pupil, both a minimum expected grade and an extended target grade is identified. Progress is monitored by half-termly teacher assessments. Underperformance is highlighted, offering the potential for intervention and support, and planning has been sharpened to introduce efficient intervention strategies for the next academic year. Some teachers assess pupils' work carefully and share with them high expectations

of what they might achieve. However, practice remains variable and there is not a consistently rigorous approach across the whole school.

While progress on systems to support teachers in raising attainment is reasonable, the effect as yet on the pupils' achievement is limited.

Key Issue 2: improve the quality of teaching & learning

The school's own lesson observations have been helpfully supplemented by LEA monitoring; the LEA's overall view of the proportion of satisfactory teaching is in close agreement with HMI's judgement. During the last half term, the school has begun a programme of coaching and team teaching where good pedagogy is modelled and effective classroom practice shared. The school intends to continue and adapt this collaborative approach to increase teachers' confidence and effectiveness. Embedding the techniques of assessment for learning across both key stages has been an important aspect of professional development. However, implementation of successful practice remains variable in quality. While there has been an improvement in the proportion of lessons that are satisfactory or better, there are still too few in which the teaching is good or better.

Progress on this key issue is limited.

Key Issue 3: improve the pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour around the school

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour have been evaluated above.

Progress on this key issue is reasonable.

Key Issue 4: improve management at all levels

Aspects of leadership and management have been evaluated above. Grouping heads of department into curriculum teams with line management by senior managers has been significant in modelling the developmental and monitoring role that middle managers are expected to fulfil. Links between departmental heads are beginning to increase their managerial skills and confidence. However, continued turbulence in staffing and the previous lack of effective monitoring systems means that the impact of these changes on quality and standards in the classroom has yet to be seen. The temporary withdrawal of delegated powers to the governing body, while unfortunate, has signalled the LEA's intention to clarify and accelerate the decision-making processes crucial to the rapid improvement of the school.

Progress on this key issue is reasonable.