

10 March 2006

Mr G Wright
Headteacher
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Birch Road
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Dear Mr Wright

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WARDLE HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Ann Talboys HMI, and Derek Aitken and Bernard Treacy additional inspectors to your school on 1 and 2 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2005.

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Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of pupils, a governor, and two representatives from the local authority (LA). A total of 45 part lessons, one assembly and seven registration periods were observed. The school's management of its fire drill procedures was also observed.

Context

Since November 2005 there have been significant staffing changes in the senior leadership team. The new headteacher took up his post in January 2006,

succeeding the acting headteacher and an associate headteacher who were deployed to the school by the LA until December 2005. A deputy headteacher has also been appointed who will start after Easter. One assistant headteacher has left the school. Two of the acting assistant headteachers have been made permanent. A further two acting assistant headteachers have been appointed. Additionally a new head of science started in January 2006 and a head of music has been appointed for the summer term.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in the 2005 national tests at Key Stage 3 and general certificate of secondary education (GCSEs) are unsatisfactory. The performance at Key Stage 4 in the core subjects of English and mathematics was significantly above average however. Poor results in science and other areas of weakness mean that overall pupils are not making the progress they should. Of particular concern is the serious underachievement of a number of pupils at Key Stage 4, highlighted by the analysis of the 2005 results.

The school does not analyse pupils' progress sufficiently and the lack of this detailed performance data inhibits the teachers' ability to set appropriate levels of work. There are plans for the more effective use of data in the school although the pace of this development is slow and lacks urgency. Clear implications for tackling underperformance identified in the 2005 data on the school's results have not been followed through and plans for intervention with current Year 9 and 11 pupils who are underperforming are still in their infancy.

Personal development and well-being

There has been satisfactory progress in provision for the personal development and well-being of pupils since the previous monitoring visit. Pupils appreciate the stricter regulations and routines which have been established in several aspects of school life. Consequently there are improved relationships with both their peers and teachers. Pupils are trying harder and enjoying their learning more. They feel safe in school, as a result of the improving levels of behaviour and the recent installation of perimeter fencing. Some older pupils, however, continue to act thoughtlessly towards others.

Pupils are also benefiting from the opportunities to play a more prominent role in developments through the school council and year-group representation. Increasingly they see their views being taken into account, for example, on the new rewards policy. Attendance is more closely monitored in the main school, where it is still satisfactory, although there has been a slight decline since the

previous visit. However, in the sixth form both attendance and the registration arrangements for monitoring attendance are unsatisfactory. Punctuality to school has improved, although some pupils need encouragement to get to lessons on time. The number of exclusions has remained stable and initiatives are now being developed to cater better for pupils exhibiting difficult behaviour in school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

- establish an ethos based on respect and hard work, so that students' attitudes and behaviour are improved and they feel safe in the school - **satisfactory**

Quality of provision

Teaching and Learning

Senior staff changes at the beginning of the term have led to a realignment of roles and three assistant headteachers have responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning and assessment. They have assiduously pursued the development activities identified in the action plan and have begun to work towards a new assessment methodology, an issue identified in the previous monitoring visit. The teaching and learning policy has been embraced by all departments although pockets of inconsistent practice remain. The common lesson planning format is a useful document and, where it is used well, lessons are sharply focused with appropriate pace and challenge. With the exception of those pupils who receive support for specific needs, few plans made reference to the individual needs of the pupils and consequently little work was adapted to meet these needs.

Senior staff and officers from the LA have undertaken lesson observations in line with the school's action plan. The most recent observations showed the school had achieved its targets in terms of the proportion of lessons which were satisfactory or better but fell short of the target for lessons which were good or better. Staff training and the coaching programme have proved successful for a number of identified staff. Middle managers are not fully included in this monitoring system or the subsequent support and development of members of their teams.

During the inspection 45 lessons were observed: 5 were inadequate, and 40 were satisfactory or better, with 20 of these being good and 3 being outstanding. The proportion of good and outstanding lessons has increased and the school should

be proud of this improvement. However there remains a proportion of inadequate lessons and this continues to be an area of concern.

In many good lessons the pupils were expected to take some responsibility for their own learning. They responded well to the high expectations of teachers. The pupils worked hard, they were motivated and enthusiastic and achieved well. In the best lessons this was complemented by excellent relationships between staff and pupils and the obvious pleasure pupils showed when they gained success.

In the inadequate lessons pupils were not challenged by the work, which was often too easy for them, or the teacher did not effectively explain the tasks and the pupils did not understand what they were to do and consequently lost focus. In one lesson the unsatisfactory behaviour of some of the pupils went unchallenged and led to further deterioration. In some other lessons the teachers' confrontational approach to challenging behaviour was ineffective.

The development of new assessment systems has been rushed and the recently introduced 'light touch' marking has had a mixed response. The usefulness of this in prompting improvement is unclear in many areas. There was little evidence across the school of the in-depth marking of pupils' work required of all areas. The marking system is due to be evaluated imminently and this is timely.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching, by ensuring students receive challenging and interesting tasks - **satisfactory**

The curriculum and other activities

Curriculum planning and innovation has been problematic due to a period of uncertain leadership. There are timetable anomalies, such as lesson clashes in the sixth form, and split classes in the main school. Curriculum development is seen as a priority in both improving provision and raising standards. Plans are emerging for a more inclusive curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils and for some vocational courses for sixth-form students from September 2006, but the details of most of these courses have yet to be finalised.

Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Key Stage 4 is on course to be fully compliant with statutory requirements next year. New extra classes to improve the literacy skills of a small group of Year 7 pupils are more successful in promoting their social rather than literacy skills, as focused targets

are not used. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is currently under review and will be evaluated in a future visit. There is large participation in extracurricular performing arts but it is unclear whether targets are being met in other activities since these are not monitored. Skills of literacy and numeracy are not being systematically taught across the whole curriculum. Work-related learning remains at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

The school has made satisfactory progress in the quality of care it provides. Arrangements for child protection are properly in place. In general, staff are committed to creating a safe environment and make appropriate risk assessments.

The arrangements for evacuating the school during the fire alarm, and in particular the checking and registering of pupils, were unsatisfactory. The school did not have reliable information about which sixth-formers were in school at that time. A lack of leadership was evident in the confusion about how pupils should respond to the alarm, register and return to the school building. This was partly a consequence of the recently erected fencing but revealed a failure to anticipate and manage the situation well.

The quality of careers guidance is good. However, guidance on what pupils need to do in order to improve depends upon departments or individual teachers and is variable. Although there is underachievement amongst some boys, the school does not yet have in place systems to track this and intervene with appropriate remedial action and support.

The sixth form

Progress in the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form continues to be satisfactory. The quality of guidance given to pupils entering the sixth form has improved and the number dropping out of courses half way through the current academic year is very small. Students feel that the changes in teaching and learning are helping them to improve. They also enjoy being part of the school community and benefit from supportive relationships with fellow students and teachers.

Further improvement is still needed in other aspects of sixth-form provision. Attendance in the sixth form remains below average and is not showing the improvement expected. The current arrangements to record and monitor attendance are unsatisfactory. The curriculum remains limited although there are plans to widen it and offer students more opportunities for progression with effect

from the next academic year. The opportunities for curriculum enrichment also remain limited.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

in the sixth form:

- ensure students receive adequate guidance on their choice of courses -
good

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has been in post from January 2006. The newly appointed deputy headteacher is currently released for one day a fortnight to work in the school. The headteacher is aware of the need to maintain the momentum of the previous two terms. However the rate of progress has not been sustained. The headteacher is concerned to secure sustainable improvement. Strong leadership is needed for this along with urgency in tackling issues, particularly those which can be quickly resolved.

In developing leadership greater clarity is needed on the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders. Overall, subject leadership is satisfactory, but subject leaders are not currently empowered to monitor staff or manage pupils' behaviour in their departments. The action plan indicates April 2006 as the date when monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is devolved to middle managers. Currently there is little progress towards this. The majority of staff are strongly committed to the success of the school and are working hard to achieve improvement. A behaviour management policy is being developed, necessary for those staff needing to develop less confrontational styles in managing pupils' behaviour. The school is still dependent on the services of supply staff.

There is some uncertainty regarding the financial health of the school with an increased deficit anticipated in this year. The school is looking to appoint a bursar to improve its financial management.

The governing body continues to provide a good balance of challenge and support for the headteacher and the school. Governors are fully involved through the various committees in working for the success of the school, concerned to establish and sustain improvement. In response to the financial concerns the governing body has requested regular updates and has appointed a governor with appropriate expertise.

Specialist school status as a performing arts college is not currently proving a lever for whole-school improvement. Consideration should be given to how to better integrate the specialism in order for it to impact on whole-school improvement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

- provide more support to teachers in dealing with students - **satisfactory**
- ensure that senior staff set better role models for their colleagues - **satisfactory**
- identify weaknesses more rigorously and deal with them more quickly - **inadequate**

to meet statutory requirements:

Issue	Response
provide a daily act of collective worship;	The school was fully compliant at the time of the first monitoring inspection. This is no longer a key issue and will not be reported on separately in subsequent visits.
draw up and implement policies for racial equality and race relations	The school has made satisfactory progress but is still not yet fully compliant as the policies have yet to be ratified by the governors prior to adoption.
teach the requirements of the National Curriculum in ICT and citizenship;	The school has made satisfactory progress and is fully compliant for citizenship and will be fully compliant for ICT from September 2006.
provide reports to parents on students' progress in citizenship	The school was fully compliant at the time of the first monitoring inspection. This is no longer a key issue and will not be reported on separately in subsequent visits.

External support

The LA is actively involved in supporting the school. It is aware of developments in this transitional period and is also concerned about the school's financial position.

Main Judgements

- Progress since being subject to special measures– **satisfactory**
- Progress since previous monitoring inspection – **satisfactory**
- Newly qualified teachers **may be appointed** in some subject areas on specific request.

Priorities for further improvement

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of senior staff
- Establish consistent assessment systems for monitoring pupils' progress and target setting
- Complete the revision of the curriculum for implementation in September 2006
- Improve: provision in science; consistency of marking; and differentiation in lessons to meet the needs of high attaining pupils.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for Rochdale and the Local Learning Skills Council.

Yours sincerely

Mick Blaylock
H M Inspector