



7 April 2006

Ms R Totton
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Whitby
North Yorkshire
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Dear Ms Totton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WHITBY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Christopher Keeler HMI, Ross Parker and Mike Driver, Additional Inspectors, to your college on 5 and 6 April 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures in October 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed 33 parts of lessons including three registration periods, and one assembly. Documents were scrutinised and inspectors met with the headteacher, other nominated staff, the chair of governors, and two representatives from the local authority (LA), and spoke informally with pupils.

Context

This visit coincided with the last two days of the spring term.

Achievement and standards

Although standards are average overall, students do not make enough progress from the well-above-average standards attained before they come to the school. As a result achievement is unsatisfactory. In the 2005 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations, the proportion of students who gained five GCSE passes at grades A* to C was similar to the national average. Compared to the standards they had reached by the age of 11 this appeared to be satisfactory progress. However the great majority of students had made very good progress between Years 7 and 9, and the quality of teaching at the college did not enable them to maintain this momentum through Years 10 and 11. In English, mathematics and science, students did not build on their good performance in tests at the end of Year 9. Unusually, girls made less progress than boys, and the school recognises that boys performed less well in technology subjects. Students with special education needs related to their behaviour and motivation made exceptionally poor progress between Years 9 and 11 compared to similar students nationally.

The most recent data suggests that this situation is improving. Staff at all levels in the college are beginning to use data more effectively to monitor students' progress. Managers are aware of students who are underachieving, and subjects where progress is not as good as it should be. Strategies to raise standards in the short term have been employed appropriately. However, the college recognises the need to analyse assessment data systematically in order to identify the causes of underachievement and then adapt teaching strategies to overcome barriers to learning in the longer term.

In the sixth form, targets were not met in examination results in 2005, which continued a pattern of underachievement. The school has tightened monitoring procedures significantly, as well as making changes to teaching approaches. The most recent data indicates that students in Year 13 are on track to achieve grades which they could expect after their lower-than-predicted results at the end of Year 11. There has also been improvement in Year 12, although the rate of progress varies significantly between subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. However the attitudes to learning of a small minority of students are unacceptable. This is

evident in some lessons where they take little notice of their teachers, are too easily distracted and as a result make limited progress. To a large extent this is linked to teaching that, whilst satisfactory, fails to engage and meet the needs of all pupils. Furthermore, inappropriate attitudes in and out of the classroom are not challenged consistently and in consequence are perceived by the students as acceptable. Positive attitudes to learning are evident where teachers have established good relationships with students, work is matched to their needs and high expectations are made clear. Students enjoy being part of the choir and are justly proud of their success in the Eskdale festival. They have more opportunity to take an active role in college affairs, for instance in the 'school rewards group' which is seeking ways of raising students' self-esteem by ensuring that effort is recognised. Attendance is satisfactory overall, although for some groups, attendance was below average during the visit.

Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good in the sixth form. Post-16 students have good social and communication skills; they demonstrate the capacity to engage in debate and display empathy and tolerance towards others.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is improving as a result of a range of management strategies. However, inspectors agree with the college's own assessment that the quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate; judgements from lesson observations undertaken by the college broadly match those of inspectors. Regular monitoring and evaluation by senior managers have identified strengths and weaknesses in teaching and enabled support to be targeted where it is most needed. Middle managers are beginning to undertake lesson observations following training and support from the LA. Underperforming departments are closely monitored and have worked, with external support, to produce action plans to improve provision.

The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in 30 out of the 33 sessions observed; it was good in eight and outstanding in one.

In lessons that were good or better, planning incorporated a broad range of activities that captured and sustained students' interest. Teachers established a brisk pace through lively teaching methods, using targeted and probing questions to assess students' progress and extend their learning.

Students responded well and enjoyed the challenge, making good progress as a result.

Most lessons followed a structured plan and teachers regularly outlined learning objectives to students, although they sometimes lacked precision. However, lessons that were satisfactory overall were characterised by a number of common weaknesses that reduced the pace of learning. Although a variety of activities was planned, these were not always well matched to students' different abilities. Teachers dominated too much of the lesson and there were too few opportunities for students to take an active part in their learning. Students became passive and made less progress as a result. A significant number of concluding plenary sessions were too rushed to enable students to review their learning effectively. In lessons where the teaching was inadequate, planned activities were inappropriate; students lost interest and took little part in the lesson.

The college has focused on developing the use of assessment for learning. Pockets of good practice exist in the use of peer assessment and marking which guides students on how to improve. However the quality of marking remains variable; in too many books it is cursory and in some instances, books have been left unmarked for lengthy periods.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise the standards and achievement of all pupils – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The roles of senior and middle leaders have been redefined to clarify responsibilities and lines of accountability. The college's most recent self-evaluation by senior leaders provides an honest and more accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Middle managers have benefited from external support to develop their leadership skills. They have a greater understanding of the process of self-evaluation and the part they play in raising school standards and achievement, although not all have developed the necessary skills to fulfil their role effectively.

An action plan to address the weaknesses identified, and to improve the effectiveness of post-16 provision, has been produced by senior leaders in consultation with the LA, governors, staff, parents and pupils. Five strands address the three areas for improvement and some interim milestones are

provided against which to assess progress. Senior leaders have focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning and have regularly monitored the impact of actions taken to raise standards and achievement, with some positive effect. However, the timescale of the plan is ambitious in its aim to remove the college from special measures by October 2006. Although actions planned are appropriate, the pace with which they have been implemented is currently unsustainable. The demands of a large number of different initiatives introduced by senior leaders over a short space of time have reduced the impact of some measures taken to address areas for improvement. The headteacher has not provided a sufficiently clear strategic overview, or prioritised those actions which tackle areas for improvement most effectively. As a result, a focused and co-ordinated team approach to college improvement, including all staff, has not been securely established.

The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of two additional governors by the LA and three new parent governors. The governing body has a greater understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses as a result of more precise information received from the headteacher and other college staff. Committees have been restructured to take responsibility for different aspects of the plan and, following training, governors are more confident to ask questions about progress made against areas for improvement.

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

- ensure that governors and senior managers produce accurate and objective evaluations that reflect reality – satisfactory progress
- implement and monitor management strategies more rigorously to ensure all pupils achieve as well as they should – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA's statement of action meets requirements and clearly outlines the support to be provided for the college. The LA's representatives recognise that previous monitoring did not highlight the college's underachievement as a cause for concern. However, current levels of support have focused sharply on targeted areas for improvement. The LA acknowledges that the original target date of October 2006 for the removal of special measures is ambitious and plans to review the level of support in order to develop the college's ability to take responsibility for self-evaluation and management over a more realistic timescale. Middle and senior leaders have valued and benefited from training by external providers and the LA in leadership skills, in moderating

judgements about the quality of teaching and in using assessment data to track progress.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Quality of LA's statement of action - satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop further, the teaching strategies which engage pupils in their learning and enable them to learn more independently.
- Evaluate the impact of the wide range of actions taken, in order to focus upon and prioritise those which will accelerate progress most effectively.
- Secure a team approach to school improvement that involves all staff and is steered by a clear, shared vision communicated by the headteacher.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director of Education.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
H M Inspector