

3 February 2006
Mr D Pridding
Headteacher
Thrybergh Comprehensive School
Arran Hill
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South Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Pridding

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THRYBERGH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Lawrence Denholme, Ross Parker and Mike Driver, additional inspectors, to your school on 1 and 2 February, 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 was placed in special measures in May 2005

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Evidence

During the visit, 33 parts of lessons, 3 registration sessions, the exclusion centre and an assembly were inspected. Inspectors scrutinised school documents and sampled pupils' work. We met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, representatives from the local authority and held discussions with senior staff in connection with the key issues. We also held meetings with the school improvement partner and the director of the Thrybergh Education Action Zone. In addition, we observed the school at break and lunchtimes. We also attended the Year 9 options evening and held informal discussions with a number of teaching and non-teaching staff.

Context

The school continues to experience some turbulence in its staffing. Some key staff are long-term absentees, including a deputy headteacher, the co-ordinator for special educational needs and the primary liaison officer. In addition, the head of English is leaving, and there have been some reassignments because of the new

faculty structure. In response to this, the school has bolstered the senior team with the Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 co-ordinators. In addition, an experienced English specialist has been recruited. The ongoing building work means, some of the school is still inaccessible and temporary accommodation is being used for teaching.

Achievement and standards

The latest official data and the school's own analysis show that standards in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 remain well below national averages. Similarly the progress pupils are making is inadequate, despite some improvements at Key Stage 3.

The school has acted decisively by adopting a number of mechanisms to tackle the identified issues. Central to the strategy has been the introduction of the pupil attainment review system (PARS) to track and evaluate data. It has allowed the school accurately to identify and target pupils at risk or on the borderline of achieving the benchmark A* to C grades at GCSE or Level 5 in the Key Stage 3 national tests. These pupils then receive tailored additional support. Similarly, significant work has been undertaken to embed faculty self-evaluation and incorporate raising achievement and standards into every member of staff's performance management objectives. This has increased accountability and a feeling of shared responsibility.

Because of the greater rigour in tracking and evaluating pupils' progress, and the more effective use of data to inform planning and learning, staff and pupils now have better knowledge of pupils' levels of attainment and the progress they are making. Staff training has been important in establishing this increased awareness. The school has also taken a number of steps to support the core subjects through academic mentors, local authority link advisors and advanced skills teachers. In addition, there is now more frequent assessment, and use of booster classes.

Underpinning this work has been a strategy to improve literacy, engage earlier and more effectively with pupils from feeder school and enhance pupils' self-esteem, motivation and expectations. In addition, better support is being provided for external assessment, particularly in managing coursework.

The school's latest monitoring suggests that the number of pupils achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE is set to climb significantly in the coming year. The predictions for results in Key Stage 3 also indicate an improvement.

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

- To raise standards - **satisfactory**

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development is good, with spiritual, moral, social and cultural education enhanced by a strong tutorial programme and effective assemblies: inspectors saw outstandingly good tutorial work in Year 7. The pupils' well-being is supported by good pastoral care, and policies that reinforce positive behaviour.

There is an effective centre working with pupils who cannot be managed in the classroom. It offers help and guidance, for example in managing anger, and reaches out to work with parents and other agencies. Helping pupils rather than excluding them is part of the school's inclusive ethos.

Attendance has improved, but remains unsatisfactory. New policies have been implemented more fully, such as the systems for rewards and electronic registration. However, there have been teething problems and valuable support staff time is diverted into carrying out manual calculations. Attendance data is now displayed well in a corridor, but not in individual classrooms. During the visit, punctuality to lessons was much improved and there was less internal truancy.

The pupils are becoming proud of their school. Attitudes continue to improve, while Student Voice and the school council ensure that the pupils' views are articulated and acted upon. Success in reaching targets, together with inventive teaching and good relationships with many teachers, enhances self-esteem and raises expectations.

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

- To improve the pupils' attitudes and their involvement in learning so that they make better progress - **good**

Quality of provision

There are still shortcomings in the overall quality of teaching and learning, but the proportion of good teaching has improved significantly. A major factor behind the improvement is that many more teachers now accept their responsibility to make lessons challenging, interesting and enjoyable. Pupils cite this as one reason for improving attendance. Another highly significant factor is the accelerating focus on self-evaluation within faculties. This has already combined close analysis of pupils' work with feedback from pupils about their experience in lessons, to establish a clear agenda for further improvement. The school is well placed to build on the good practice and support improvement in those areas where teaching is weaker.

In the better lessons, teachers supplement their good subject knowledge with high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They exploit a wide range of learning approaches and use questioning skilfully to generate curiosity and enthusiasm. One Year 7 group that included a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties looked like high-flying mathematicians when they explored sophisticated number series.

These features are now easier to achieve because teachers have established productive routines in their lessons. They work hard, and pupils emulate them; they make good use of the rewards system as well as the effective sanctions. When additional staff are available they are fully aware of what pupils need to achieve and are able to give the teacher good support.

In the weaker lessons the teachers' expectations were too low. They set low-level tasks, which meant pupils were busy without learning anything. When pupils lacked motivation, activities were designed to prevent this from causing disruption, rather

than addressing the problem. Insufficient joint planning meant support staff were ineffective in enriching the learning experience for pupils.

The use of assessment to monitor progress continues to improve, both at whole-school level and within subjects. Pupils have a good understanding of what they ought to achieve because teachers analyse data carefully to set challenging targets, and adapt the resources to ensure that these challenges are realistic for pupils with different abilities. They also set tight timescales so that the pace of learning is brisk and pupils enjoy the challenge. Pupils are frequently asked to evaluate their own work using clear criteria, so there is little likelihood of settling for low standards. Pupils are much more aware of what level they are working at, what it means they can do, and importantly what they need to do to improve further. In addition, the setting of homework and quality of marking are becoming more consistent across subjects.

The plans for the launch of the new curriculum in September 2006 are at an advanced stage. A full review has informed the development of a richer and more appropriate curriculum, which is broader and more balanced at Key Stage 4. A host of new opportunities have been introduced, including academic, vocational and work-based learning activities, which better reflect the needs of the pupils. Importantly the school has produced exemplar support materials that provide excellent guidance for pupils in making their choices. Similarly, the school has engaged with parents, so that they are in a position to support their child in making the right choices. This was very noticeable during the recent options evening for Year 9, which was well attended. Good links have been established with Rotherham College to widen the vocational opportunities available to pupils and strengthen transitional arrangements. In addition, the school plans to phase out the inappropriate study support provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Key Stage 4.

At Key Stage 3, the curriculum review has led to pupils being grouped according to ability in the core and for languages, while textiles are being added to the technology provision, as well as drama and a combined humanities course. The school planning for the Year 7 foundation year is also at an advanced stage. There was also improvement in planning work according to the pupils' different abilities.

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

- Improve the quality of the teaching – **satisfactory**
- Improve the use of assessment to inform pupils' learning and monitor progress – **good**
- To ensure the curriculum is relevant to the needs of pupils - **good**

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders demonstrate clarity of vision and a strong strategic awareness. One example of this is the delegation of responsibilities to and subsequent empowerment of middle leaders, who are thriving in their new-found autonomy. This faculty structure is proving highly effective and underpins the school's plans for effective dissemination of policy and practice.

Monitoring is becoming thorough and systematic, and includes attention to weaker teaching: there is increasingly good use of data in analysis and evaluation. Governors work effectively with the school. They respect and value the staff, and there is strong and committed leadership from the chair of governors. There is a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and a shared commitment to improvement.

Resources are presently well used, but rebuilding costs and some historical over-staffing have left a significant deficit budget. Measures are in hand to make savings and secure additional funding but they remain marginal in relation to the total figure; there is a welcome commitment from the local authority to support the school through those difficulties.

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Although attendance remains a major issue, policy on inclusion seeks to address this by working with local providers of further education on an alternative curriculum that will engage disaffected pupils. The school has an increasingly good reputation locally, helped by staff's engagement in the community.

There are robust and credible action plans for each of the key issues: leadership and management provide the school with a good capacity to improve.

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

- Continue to develop leadership and management at all levels - **good**

External support

The local authority continues to provide a good level of support to the school, which remains subject to the highest level of intervention. It has proved particularly supportive in introducing the new approach to each faculty's self-evaluation. In addition, the school improvement partner continues to work very effectively with the school. She has been influential in improving the atmosphere and ethos in the school and making better use of the data to enable more accurate monitoring and target-setting. The school is also benefiting from an increasingly strong relationship with the Thrybergh Education Action Zone, particularly in relation to the cross-phase intervention strategy, behaviour improvement project and the bridging projects in the core subjects.

Main Judgements

- Progress since being subject to special measures is good.
- Progress since the last monitoring visit is good.
- The school may continue to appoint newly qualified teachers.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further improvement continue to be the key issues identified at the school's inspection and those highlighted during the last monitoring visit in relation to attendance, enhancing the quality of in-class support and working with the local authority to stabilise the school's finances.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Young', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector