



14 February 2006

Mr B Jordan
Headteacher
Bebington High Sports College
Higher Bebington Road,
Bebington,
Wirral,
Merseyside,
CH63 2PS

Dear Mr Jordan

MONITORING INSPECTION OF BEBINGTON HIGH SPORTS COLLEGE'S INADEQUATE SIXTH FORM

Introduction

Following my visit with Clive Moss HMI to your school on 8 and 9 February 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the sixth form was judged to be inadequate in October 2004.

This letter will be published 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 the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated senior staff, the director of sixth form, the key-skills co-ordinator, groups of sixth-form students and Year 11 pupils, and the chair of governors. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with students.

Context

Six Year 12 students have left the sixth form since the last visit in October 2005. This brings the numbers on roll to 56 in Year 12 and 17 in Year 13. The local authority (LA) has provided additional support for the senior management team of the school through the part-time secondment of an adviser in the role of acting deputy headteacher. The governors have rightly decided to seek to appoint a deputy headteacher to the vacancy.

Achievement and standards

The school has tackled the concerns raised in the last monitoring letter with increased determination. The results of the level 3 examinations in 2005 have been analysed more thoroughly, comparing students' results with predictions based on their GCSE results. This has identified subjects where performance is stronger or weaker but has not been followed up to exploit features of good practice or tackle areas of weakness.

The school has introduced a suitable system of tracking students' performance against their target minimum grades. Teachers assess the standard of students' work and indicate whether the students are on track, above or below their targets. Students understand this system, and were involved in discussing with form tutors, often in general terms, how they might improve. Any concerns are raised through a traffic lights system that involves the students and their parents at the appropriate stage. The school's data indicates that most students are progressing in line with or above their targets. Predicted grades for unit examinations in January 2006 aligned well with students' target grades. However, one issue that the school should explore is whether the targets unintentionally condone any underachievement at GCSE. Wider use of 'challenge targets', as set by some departments, could help address this. In addition, not all teachers assess students' work with equal confidence and accuracy; the early work on portfolios of assessed work is a useful step.

A new marking policy has recently been introduced and places emphasis on progress towards target grades. There are some examples of students' assessed work on display, although not always with associated criteria. The quality of marking by teachers shows improvement but there is scope to increase the students' role in marking their own work and evaluating that of their peers. There is also more to be done to promote teachers' use of data in lesson planning so that tasks are modified or extended to take account of students' widely differing needs and abilities. Some extension activities are usefully identified in schemes of work.

While the school has laid important foundations to support the raising of standards, some are in the early stages of implementation and have yet to become embedded features of the school's work. Importantly, some aspects also have the potential to drive improvements elsewhere in the school.

Progress on the area for improvement:

Area 1: raise standards at the ends of Years 12 and 13 by improving academic targets, setting and monitoring – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour was excellent: they are a credit to the school. They show a high level of respect for each other and their teachers; these relationships continue to be a strength of the school. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and think that improvements made to the monitoring of their progress have helped them to be

more focused. They have well considered preferences for study and employment beyond the sixth form. The school's increased emphasis on independent learning is improving students' ability to manage their own work and encourages them to take responsibility for it. Most students find the supervised study sessions useful. The school might consider the point at which good learning habits are sufficiently embedded to allow Year 13 students to take more responsibility for managing their own time.

Students spoke positively about the opportunities they receive through the student council to voice their opinions. They cited examples of improvements to facilities that they have been able to organise themselves and of how their views were requested on changes, such as the review process. Most students now participate in extracurricular activities, including involvement in the community. They spoke enthusiastically about the peer-mentoring scheme, which gave them a heightened sense of personal responsibility and satisfaction from making a contribution to the school. Attendance is, however, unsatisfactory. The school has improved procedures to monitor attendance, but the level has declined in comparison with the same period last year. Sometimes students do not attend lessons even after registering.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching continues to strengthen. Monitoring is carried out regularly and the assistant headteacher responsible for this area is well informed about where there is good practice and areas that need improving. The selection of 'assessment for learning' as the focus for lesson observations has resulted in a sharper perception of the importance of learning and also in greater emphasis within lessons on giving clear advice to students about how to improve their work. Most students were able to describe their performance in relation to their target minimum grades and many were able to describe what they needed to do to improve. A few teachers use assessment information to plan lessons, but emphasis on meeting the full range of needs of different students is generally underdeveloped.

All the teaching was at least satisfactory and half was good: this profile matches the school's view. In the best lessons, teachers used a range of interesting activities and ensured students' more active involvement. They made good use of open questions and encouraged students to expand on their answers. These features reflect the positive impact of training provided by the school.

There remains a gap between the quality of teaching and learning. Students made good progress in only a quarter of the lessons. Progress was more rapid when teachers identified particular difficulties experienced by students and provided targeted support, or used assessment criteria in conjunction with annotated examples of students' work to help them understand how to improve. Some students could recall previous learning and relate it to new topics, but most needed prompting by their teachers. Some classes were very small and this limited the range of approaches teachers were able to use. Teaching styles appropriate to larger classes were less effective in these small groups.

Satisfactory progress has been made on promoting independent learning. Many teachers are identifying points in lessons where they expect students to demonstrate relevant skills. Students are being taught organisational skills in some lessons. Many students are able to give a coherent account of how they plan for and use personal study time. However, there is a lack of clarity about the arrangements for students to use the information and communication technology (ICT) facility for private study. Although individual students appreciated the flexibility to organise their use of the time, others expressed frustration that access to facilities was restricted at certain times. Attendance at private study sessions is monitored, but the effectiveness of students' use of this time has not been explored.

Further improvements have been made to the curriculum. New vocational courses have been introduced at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, some with the clear intention to provide a progression route into the sixth form. A good range of courses, including vocational subjects, is being offered to students in 2006-07. However, not all students are able to participate in physical education, which is a missed opportunity given the school's specialist sports college status. The arrangements for religious education (RE), personal, health, social and citizenship education (PHSCE), and key skills remain inadequate. The focus on key skills accords well with the need to improve students' proficiency in these areas. Although sufficient emphasis on key skills is given within the timetabled lesson, support through other subjects is underdeveloped. There are plans to provide for RE and other subjects later in the year. However, the programme is overcrowded and still lacks co-ordination.

Good progress has been made on improving guidance. Data has been used to help Year 11 pupils make appropriate choices of courses. Progress reviews with sixth-form students have supported improved rates of retention and ensured earlier intervention with students who are struggling.

Progress on the areas for improvement:

Area 2: improve the quality of teaching – satisfactory progress

- **modify the curriculum so it meets the needs of all students;**
- **improve the students' basic skills, such as ICT, and the capacity for independent study;**
- **improve advice and guidance to prospective sixth-form students so that they are directed to appropriate courses in which they are likely to succeed, whether the courses are at school or elsewhere.**

-

Area 3: Satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The quality of senior management has improved, particularly in the implementation of management systems and in senior staff's expectations of other staff. The senior staff have demonstrated a greater sense of urgency, and have a more positive

outlook that is reflected in their constructive reaction to external evaluation. They show a readiness to review and adjust strategies. The capacity of the senior team has been strengthened in recent weeks by the addition of the acting deputy headteacher; she has had a significant impact, particularly in developing marking, but understands that this work needs integrating into the school's broader drive on improving assessment.

Day-to-day management of the sixth form has improved. The director of sixth form has visited other schools to explore good practice and this has informed the introduction and modification of some systems. Form tutors meet on a regular basis and specific areas of responsibility have been allocated. Monitoring of students' progress has improved; the tutors had useful discussions with students about how they might improve their performance. However, data is not always interrogated to best effect; for example attendance rates to school and lessons.

The school and LA are working from a new joint action plan to address the remaining weaknesses in the sixth form. Regular meetings of a core group of LA officers, governors and the headteacher track the progress of the action plan and identify action points. However, while a useful tool for monitoring purposes, the records of these meetings are not evaluative. The headteacher provided HMI with an evaluation of progress that outlined where improvement had been made, supported by data in some instances. However, evaluation is not an embedded characteristic of leadership and management at all levels within the school. In this respect, the school's work has not moved on since the last visit. Consequently, although senior staff are gaining in experience, there remain weaknesses in strategic leadership at individual and corporate levels because the impact of actions are not routinely evaluated and used to determine the next steps. A particular concern is that the performance management targets of senior staff are insufficiently well defined. They relate to activities rather than expected outcomes and impact. Moreover, senior staff are not required to evaluate on a regular and formal basis the effectiveness of their leadership of their areas of responsibility. This means that the headteacher is not well placed to hold them robustly to account.

The governing body is increasingly effective in checking the school's progress. They are well informed and ask key questions. The school is reducing its budget deficit in accordance with the recovery plan. However, it is not clear whether or not the main school is subsidising the sixth form at this stage of its development. Future planning for the sixth form might usefully include an analysis of the relative costs of the three key stages.

Progress on the area for improvement:

Area 4: improve leadership and management of the sixth form at all levels of management in the school and ensure staff and governors are well aware of what best practice is in a modern sixth form – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA continues to meet its commitment to the sixth form and in supporting whole-school strategies for improvement. Since the last monitoring visit, particular emphasis has been given to building the capacity of senior leadership. The 14-19 manager continues to support the director of sixth form in developing his skills of leadership and management. The LA has adopted a robust approach to monitoring the implementation of the action plan, reflecting a necessary increased urgency.

Main Judgements

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – **satisfactory**

Progress since the sixth form was identified as inadequate – **inadequate**

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure students receive a coherent and appropriately balanced programme for PHSCE, key skills, RE and form time.
- Make better use of the outcomes of monitoring and data analysis to evaluate progress and plan or refine the next steps.
- Improve the effectiveness of line management of senior staff by the headteacher, particularly in relation to their responsibilities in the action plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones
H M Inspector