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25 May 2006

Mrs K Leaver
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Leaver

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF JEFF JOSEPH SALE MOOR TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Judith Tolley, Lawrence Denholm, Derek Aitken and Steven Wall, Additional Inspectors, to your college on 23 and 24 May 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 college became subject to special measures in May 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 the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of staff, groups of students, the chair and vice-chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Achievement and standards

The college expects the proportion of students gaining five or more higher grade GCSEs to be 63% overall in 2006, representing a further improvement from 2005. However, the proportion gaining five higher grade passes including English and mathematics is likely to be very much lower at about 22%. Although headline grade figures are at or even above national

standards because of successful vocational courses, the college's performance in key subjects remains well below national expectations.

The latest data on standards in Year 9 suggests that they are well below national expectations and also below the college's targets in English, mathematics and science on the basis of teacher assessments. Standards in other subjects are very varied, with low standards in design and technology, geography, history and religious education.

Students' progress in lessons was very variable. It is still less than satisfactory in one out of five lessons, although progress is good in two fifths of lessons. Students' progress is weakest when lessons have not been planned with the needs of all groups of learners in mind, generally with tasks being too difficult for at least some groups; problems also occur where students' understanding of key terms has not been ensured so that they do not fully understand how to respond to tasks. Some students do not readily make connections between their learning from one lesson to the next.

Personal development and well-being

The college continues to make satisfactory progress in improving the behaviour of students. The Behaviour for Learning Strategy has just been extended to cover conduct out of class; behaviour around the college was better than during the previous monitoring inspection. The college's intention to introduce a common lunchtime in September to combat disruption to lessons is timely. Some older students remain boisterous and inconsiderate, while others are content to tolerate their actions as amused bystanders. Behaviour in lessons has improved markedly, as teachers are applying sanctions more consistently. Students are more likely to think twice before risking a lengthy detention. In discussion, students comment positively on this change but they are also clear that the problem is 'not yet fully sorted'. The rewards system is generally proving successful. Students value the rewards and believe the targets they are set to achieve them are realistic, although they say there is some abuse of the system. This improvement in the ethos for learning is reflected in the declining number of exclusions and detentions. Students' attitudes to learning are still inconsistent across subjects, as reflected in weaknesses in organisational skills. The college is poised to introduce a new inclusion centre to cater for students experiencing pastoral or curricular difficulties.

Attendance continues to improve slowly but remains well below average in comparison both to national averages and to similar schools. Teachers do not stress its importance enough by routinely taking a register in their lessons and form attendance does not have a high profile for students. The recorded levels of unauthorised absences are now more realistic but attendance data is not analysed in sufficient depth to give a real impetus to improvement. Punctuality to college and to lessons is improving. However, the movement of students to afternoon registration is not well managed, resulting in loud and noisy behaviour both inside and outside classrooms. This does not promote accurate registration and results in a ragged end to the college day.

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

- improve the behaviour of students, both in and out of lessons, and their attendance – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The profile of grades for teaching and learning has remained similar to the previous monitoring visit, although the number of outstanding lessons has risen significantly. Of the lessons observed, 41% were good or better. The 19% of lessons judged inadequate match the number previously recorded. In the lessons judged to be good or outstanding, effective learning was promoted because the teaching was challenging and appropriate to the ability levels of the students. The pace of teaching was fast and students did not have the time or inclination to do anything but work hard and productively. On several occasions in the outstanding lessons, students were totally engrossed in their learning and enjoyment was of the highest order. Students appreciated the detailed marking of their work, knew the progress they were making and what they needed to do to improve.

In the less successful lessons, teaching was categorised by inappropriate challenge and a failure to match activities to the abilities of the learners. Teachers also assumed students had knowledge and understanding from previous lessons, which was not always the case. As a result, students did not understand the point of what they were being asked to do and sometimes reacted with inappropriate behaviour. However, teachers are becoming more consistent in applying the school's discipline code, resulting in some improvement to behaviour in lessons. Marking frequently does not give students a clear understanding of strategies for improving their work.

As with marking and assessment, the quality of lesson planning is inconsistent. In the best cases, lesson planning is clear, focused and precise. Often, however, clear links with previous learning are not taken into consideration and strategies to test the qualities of students' learning in lessons are not sufficiently robust.

The college is continuing to develop a wider understanding of what constitutes good teaching. A teaching and learning group has been established and staff training on improving teaching and assessment is continuing. The consideration and sharing of good practice is now a regular agenda item at departmental meetings. Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is improving and the outcomes are starting to be used effectively to provide support for teachers identified as weaker practitioners. The college is planning to develop the use of its wealth of data to track students' progress more effectively and raise standards and achievement. The college is confident that these initiatives will have a positive impact in due course. However, evaluation strategies for their impact should be sharper.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is generally satisfactory and now meets statutory requirements, securing proper time for all subjects, and remedying previous deficits in music and art and design. The college's implementation of the National Strategy is satisfactory, with good work in information and communication technology (ICT) and in English, but is less strong across the curriculum. Reorganised provision in Years 10 and 11 now meets the needs of Key Stage 4 students with a good balance of GCSE and vocational courses, appropriate to the college's specialist status.

There is a significant range of work-related courses, including a strong programme of work related learning, both through a two week placement undertaken by all students in Year 10 and input to all the vocational programmes from local partners and employers. Very good careers provision is embedded in a coherent PSHE programme. Where appropriate, alternative provision, using external agencies, has been developed as part of the college's commitment to inclusion.

There has been progress in developing ICT across the curriculum, and the priority being given to literacy and numeracy, with good new appointments, is beginning to bear fruit. The use of ICT, including interactive whiteboards, is having some impact upon learning and teaching styles but not consistently.

Enrichment activities are good, with teachers and support staff generously sharing their time to secure effective academic support classes, and after-school homework clubs along with opportunities in such areas as art, music, sport and computing.

Subject schemes of work across the curriculum have been revised to include citizenship statements. Provision for literacy and numeracy has been strengthened by the appointment of a new curriculum deputy headteacher, and of co-ordinators for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, evidence of whose work is now beginning to be seen, although staff understanding in these respects is still patchy.

The last report criticised the lack of a daily act of worship. This has been partly addressed through the theme for the week and reflectional booklet being circulated every term for form tutors to use in form tutor time, but it is not fully implemented in practice. There remains evidence of significant under-investment in all three subjects of the college's specialism, which have therefore struggled to keep pace with curriculum change. Although the school is working to deal with the issue, the technology curriculum remains constrained as a result.

The College has worked to improve the systems for listening to the views and opinions of its students. Students say this aspect has improved considerably and that they are regularly consulted. Students also feel that the behaviour system provides appropriate guidance for standards of how to behave and that the climate for learning has improved as a result. The college is developing more effective strategies for the guidance of students with patterns of poor behaviour. There are clear structures in place for students to report any incidences of bullying. Students also reported improved guidance for choices at the end of Year 9.

Provision for students with learning and/or language difficulties has been mapped across the school by the local authority adviser. Six learning support assistants work with specific students in lessons but few are available to support all other students with learning needs across the curriculum. Individual education plans do not sharply define students' specific learning difficulties although some targets provide a clearer picture. Given this lack of support, the managers of special educational needs lack a strategy for ensuring that teachers' planning specifically addresses the needs of students

with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

- improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, science, design and technology, history, music and religious education – satisfactory progress
- ensure that students receive sufficient lessons in art and design, citizenship and music – good progress
- rebuild the trust that students have in staff, so they will report incidents of bullying - satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

A new deputy headteacher has been appointed with effect from September 2006 who will draw together the specialist college agenda. Several members of the leadership team will be leaving the school at the end of the present term. The senior team continues to be augmented by additional middle managers on secondment. A new assistant headteacher will be appointed and the new head of mathematics will be seconded to the senior team after the first term in post. A significantly restructured senior team will, therefore, be running the school next term and a strategy for the redesignation of roles is in an advanced stage of planning.

The college leadership has reacted energetically to recent challenges but has also begun to pursue a longer term vision. Following the last monitoring inspection, a new plan of priority activities was drawn up which provides a useful overview of strategies to secure improvement although the linking of actions to targets would be helpful. This reflects a lack of clear indicators by which senior staff may judge the effectiveness of all aspects of their work using defined outcomes. The college has also completed its self-evaluation; this is thorough and informative, but is occasionally insufficiently evaluative and will benefit from the greater use of key indicators as the college's database expands. A progress report on the college priorities is similarly detailed in actions but less clear about outcomes, especially regarding impact on students' progress. Nonetheless, actions taken have been generally well-chosen and promise to be effective in the long term, for example, in the improved support for students at risk of exclusion.

Leaders have increasing access to a range of performance indicators although data is not consistently linked to evaluation. Some available data is not deployed for maximum impact; for example, information about students sent out of lessons is not routinely made available to middle leaders as part of the

quality assurance framework. Summative assessment information is not yet presented in a format that will have greatest impact. However, the college is moving forward and is much better positioned than it was six months ago.

An element of distributed leadership continues to be significant, for example, in the use of able but less senior staff in developing improved teaching. Middle leaders are playing an increasingly effective role in the college's development and are held to account through the quality assurance framework, although a similar structure is not fully in place at a senior level.

Recent training for middle leaders has focused on the quality assurance system and increased collaboration both within the college and with other schools. Staff are making planned visits to observe high quality practice in other schools. A partnership has been formed with another school with the same specialism. A number of management posts have been advertised, including curriculum leaders in mathematics and science. A new head of humanities has recently started at the college. These changes have helped to contribute to enhanced capacity for further improvement although actual outcomes are not yet rising consistently.

The governors are increasingly rigorous in their contribution to the college leadership. Minutes provide secure evidence that they hold the college senior staff, including the headteacher, to account and examine the purpose and value of proposed actions. An experienced additional governor has been added to the team and an audit of skills is being carried out.

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

- improve leadership and management, especially in the areas of data analysis, the curriculum and support for teachers – satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority (LA) has played a key role in helping the college to deliver the restructuring of its senior leadership. It has provided support to identified weaker areas of the college through the deployment of its consultants and the headteacher reports that she has been both supported and challenged by the link adviser. A report of an LA monitoring visit was provided but it included few judgements or evaluations, for example, of the actual impact of the consultants' work. There is scope for the LA's other staff to contribute to these reviews on the basis of their continuing work in the school. The LA accepts that the college has had unusual pressures on its budget but expects

there to be a deficit; a meeting to agree a budget recovery plan has already been scheduled.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – *satisfactory*

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – *good*

The college is permitted to appoint Newly Qualified Teachers.

Priorities for further improvement

- ensure that the new leadership structure is effectively deployed to secure further improvement
- address the remaining inconsistencies in teaching, particularly by improving the use of assessment and planning to meet the needs of all learners
- monitor and evaluate more effectively the progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the curriculum
- continue to review the college's approach to the National Strategy, especially with regard to literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum
- further improve attendance and punctuality.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Gray
H M Inspector