

30 June 2006

Mr D Pridding
Headteacher
Thrybergh Comprehensive School
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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 Bernard Jones Additional Inspectors, to your school on 28 and 29 June, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school was placed in special measures in May 2005

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

Evidence

During the visit, a number of lessons, tutorial 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, a parent governor, and a representative from the local authority. We also talked with senior staff and the School Improvement Partner about the school's progress. The school was observed at break and lunchtime. An inspector observed the presentation given by the school to parents of prospective pupils at a local primary school. We also visited the Year 8 parents' evening. During the two days we engaged in informal conversations with a number of teaching and non-teaching staff about their work with the pupils.

Context

The school continues to experience some turbulence in its staffing. The deputy headteacher who has been a long-term absentee has now resigned. A number of

other teachers are also leaving at the end of term. These include: the head of modern foreign languages, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the head of drama and two members of the English department, along with the primary links co-ordinator. In response, the school has secured suitable replacements. The building work is now complete and the school no longer has any inaccessible curriculum areas.

Achievement and standards

The results from the 2005 Key Stage 3 tests and Key Stage 4 examinations show that the standards pupils reached and the progress they made was inadequate.

This is in contrast to the current position at Key Stage 3 where the provisional 2006 national test results for science and mathematics show a significant increase in the proportion of pupils obtaining Level 5 or above. Science has improved from 43% in 2005 to 58% in 2006, while mathematics has improved from 45% to 60%. This signals a major improvement in the standards and achievement of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3. Importantly both of these subjects exceeded their statutory targets. The 2006 English results were not available, but scrutiny of the school's internal monitoring suggests these results are also set to climb significantly.

Analysis of Key Stage 4 progress indicates a similar picture, with the mock examination results showing almost double the proportion of pupils gaining five higher general certificate of higher education (GCSE) grades, compared with last year. The school is robust in its assertions about the predicted grades for the summer as a result of its very thorough monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Although the standards attained in the Key Stage 3 tests and mock GCSEs remain below national averages overall, the progress pupils are making has improved considerably. This is confirmed by observations during the inspection. The pupil attainment review system (PARS) has been instrumental in allowing the school to identify, track and then support the progress of all pupils.

A major contributory factor to improved standards is the coherence and better understanding of the school's self-evaluation amongst all staff. As a result lessons, the curriculum and strategies for additional support are increasingly matched to the needs of pupils.

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

- To raise standards - **good**

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development remains good, while spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues continue to be enhanced by a strong tutorial programme. The pupils' well-being is aided by good pastoral care and by policies which reinforce appropriate behaviour. The appointment of five non-teaching year managers has been successful in this area.

Helping pupils rather than excluding them is part of the school's inclusive ethos. An example of the importance the school places on this issue is seen in the commitment to redeveloping part of the site to house the centre for pupils who cannot be managed in the classroom.

The last monitoring report noted that pupils were becoming proud of their school, and this remains the case. Attendance is improving, but is still well below average. Good attendance is helped by the introduction of electronic registration systems which have provided information used by the school in their analysis of and engagement with the issues. Other initiatives are starting to have a positive impact upon attendance rates and pupils are playing a bigger part in improvement. Punctuality too is improving and the school is benefiting as all parties come to a better understanding of the link between good attendance, punctuality and good achievement. A school-based education and welfare officer contributes well to progress in this respect.

The development of new vocational pathways, and of work-based learning has helped engage pupils in their learning. Enterprise education and the healthy schools agenda continue to contribute to good progress in this area.

The completion of the building project has resulted in an environment which is conducive to ordered behaviour and effective learning. The signals given to pupils by this new provision reinforces the value placed on pupils, and they respond well to the opportunities it offers.

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

The school has maintained a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. Senior staff and the local authority's consultants have built a very clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses across every subject area. Observations by inspectors confirm that the school's judgements are accurate. The consultants have also set up an intensive programme of individual support, modelling good practice, and coaching teachers who are working to improve their skills. This is leading to clear improvements. Staffing quality is enhanced by the recent appointment of a number of experienced teachers.

Each faculty has begun to examine its own priorities for further improvement, and this whole process has been made transparent as pupils are consulted about the effectiveness of initiatives.

Alongside this is a move to improve the effectiveness of teaching assistants, and the way that they work with teachers. During the inspection they were well deployed, monitoring how pupils were progressing, but leaving space for them to work independently wherever possible.

Assessment for learning continues to become embedded across the school. Pupils now have a good understanding of what they ought to achieve and what they have to do to improve. Because teachers know more about the different levels of attainment in their classes, they plan more carefully to ensure that the differing needs of all pupils are met. Pupils regularly assess their own efforts and are taught to do so against appropriate criteria, so reinforcing and consolidating their learning. There are good plans to ensure a greater consistency in the way teachers use homework and mark pupils' work to further raise standards.

The teachers are at different stages in their progress towards the highest standards, and some weaker practice results in inadequate lessons. Generally, teachers need to do more to develop the pupils' speaking and listening skills.

Health-and-safety procedures are generally sound, however, there is concern about the provision for pupils leaving the site safely at the end of the school day. This is caused by parents double-parking directly outside the school entrance and hampering pupils' ability to cross the road safely, with many passing in between cars on what is quite a busy road. Similarly there are issues as pupils walk up the drive. The pavement is narrow and many consequently walk on the road. As cars use this as the major entry point into the school and the leisure centre, there is potential for an accident and a solution should be sought urgently.

The new curriculum is timetabled and ready to be launched at the start of the autumn term. Inspectors have previously acknowledged the potential of this curriculum to provide pupils with a broad and balanced programme, which is better suited to the needs of all pupils and recognises their entitlement to alternatives to the traditional academic offering. The vast majority of pupils gained the option of their choice, with only a small percentage having to compromise. Plans for the Year 7 foundation programme have been put on hold, although 'learn to learn skills' will be incorporated in tutor time. This will include the development of basic literacy skills.

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

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

Leadership and management

Leadership is underpinned by a shared clarity of vision and purpose, and both the headteacher and the enhanced leadership team have successfully focused on raising standards and promoting well-being, while tapping into the support offered by governors, the authority and the School Improvement Partner. In building the larger team the school has recognized the strength within its own ranks. Some middle leaders are also proving highly effective in driving improvement.

There has been a strategic focus on curriculum and work-based learning. The school is already working with local providers of further education on an alternative curriculum. This has been strengthened by the appointment of a co-ordinator who is making a good contribution to the management of work placements, enterprise education and citizenship.

Monitoring remains thorough and systematic: the school's judgements about the quality of teaching are confirmed in observations made by the inspection team. The leadership team knows the school, and intervenes effectively to continue to raise standards and demand appropriate competence from all teaching staff.

Governors continue to work effectively with the school. They rightly respect and value their staff, with strong and committed leadership from the chair. There remains a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and a shared commitment to improvement.

The concern expressed during the last monitoring visit over the school's deficit budget has been allayed by the negotiation of a licensed deficit management scheme. This will not only bring the budget back into balance, but ensure that in doing so the improvements achieved - and the staffing needed to sustain those - are not placed in jeopardy.

The school is now an ordered and well-run community. The headteacher and his team enjoy good relationships with pupils. They are open, friendly and approachable and model in themselves the behaviour and attitudes the pupils can rightly expect. The belief expressed by a senior member of staff that 'the children here are wonderful' not only permeates her own attitudes but helps the pupils believe that of themselves - especially when supported by a growing record of success in external assessments.

There is a culture of robust self-evaluation; one that is reflective and based on strong evidence. The approach clearly shows a sequence of evaluation, analysis, plan and outcomes, backed by considered thinking at a strategic level. Highly effective leadership and management continue to 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 work closely with the school and is proving very supportive. It has adopted a proportionate approach to its intervention, as the school increasingly becomes autonomous. The same is true of the School Improvement Partner who continues to have a positive impact on the strategic direction of the school, particularly in regard to developing middle leaders. The school's collaboration with the Thrybergh Education Action Zone continues to thrive, as does its links with a number of partner schools.

Main Judgements

- Progress since being subject to special measures - **good**.
- Progress since the last monitoring visit - **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.

- In addition the school should seek a resolution to the health-and-safety issues related to pupils leaving the site at the end of the day.

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 'John Young', written in a cursive style.

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector