

14 July 2006

Mr G Wright
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wright

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WARDLE HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Stephen Hardwick HMI and Additional Inspectors Derek Aitken, Marie Cordey, Lawrence Denholm and Bernard Treacy to your school on 11 and 12 July 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 school became subject to special measures in March 2005.

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Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of pupils, a governor, and a representative from the local authority (LA). A total of 39 part lessons, one assembly and seven registration periods were observed.

Context

Since March 2006 there have been further significant staffing changes. The new deputy headteacher took up her post after Easter. Three of the previously acting assistant headteachers have been made permanent appointments. New heads of department started after Easter in music, chemistry and girls physical education. An executive officer and a bursar have been appointed. Fifteen teachers are leaving at the end of the term. Eleven new teachers have been appointed for the autumn term including one advanced skills teacher (AST) in science and eight newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Special dispensation has been given for the appointment of these

NQTs following assurances of appropriate induction arrangements, support and development opportunities in their subject areas.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards have improved from the unsatisfactory levels at the time of the 2005 inspection. Results for mathematics and science in the 2006 national tests at Key Stage 3 are in line with the school's targets and represent good progress in raising standards from the previous year. Progress on assessment and target setting suggests that the school's confidence in achieving better GCSE results in this current year is well founded. The recently published analysis of the 2005 results in the sixth form shows a downward trend in the standards attained. However overall the performance of students was in line with expectation; they made satisfactory progress. Improving attendance and attitudes in the sixth form should contribute to raising attainment from this level.

On the basis of the lessons observed, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning mean that pupils are now making better progress in lessons. Their progress was good or better in just under half of the lessons observed. The school now has a clearer understanding of where pupils are underachieving and is introducing strategies to target specific groups of learners, for example, underachieving boys in Year 7.

Personal development and well-being

There has been satisfactory progress in the provision for the personal development and well-being of the pupils since the previous monitoring visit. The school's specialist status in performing arts is beginning to enhance provision for pupils' social and cultural development across the curriculum as well as providing opportunities for cultural enrichment in music and performance. Pupils welcome the growing opportunities to contribute their ideas through the school council, year group representation and consultation. They value the increasingly effective rewards policy and speak very positively, and with pride, of their school.

Behaviour and attitudes continue to improve both in lessons and around school. Pupils feel safe and appreciate the benefits to their learning from a structured, consistent behaviour policy. Attendance is much improved at 92% overall. However it is still short of its 95% target and remains well below the target and national averages in the examination Years 11 and 13. This adversely affects pupils' learning and has a negative impact on their performance, life chances and economic well-being. Exclusions are appropriately used for persistent disruptive behaviour, verbal abuse or threatening behaviour. The number of such exclusions has declined, which is consistent with the general improvement in behaviour and behaviour management, but it is still high and heavily weighted to boys and to Year 10.

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

establish an ethos based on respect and hard work, so that students' attitudes and behaviour are improved and they feel safe in the school - satisfactory

Quality of provision

Since the March monitoring visit the school has allocated responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning to an assistant headteacher, who is supported by a director of learning. They have built upon the gains evident earlier in the year, contributing to the increasing rate of improvement. Training opportunities have resulted in middle managers being better able to assess the quality of their own work and that of their colleagues. The monitoring of lessons by senior teachers indicates that improvement in the current term has been good. Evidence gathered during the inspection confirms this assessment. Of the 39 lessons observed, 6 were outstanding, 18 were good, 14 were satisfactory and only one was inadequate; 60% of the teaching was good or better.

In the outstanding lessons, teachers showed a keen awareness of individuals' needs and the work enabled them to learn quickly. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subject, high expectations and inspire pupils with their enthusiasm. The best teaching in the sixth form lets students take responsibility for their learning, making use of individual research, paired work and group discussions as well as whole-class teaching. In general, teachers are now making better use of data in planning lessons and so ensuring that the challenge of the work matches a wide range of pupils' needs. There is an increased emphasis on exploiting the school's performing arts status to enhance teaching and learning across the curriculum. However the needs of gifted and talented pupils are not always addressed appropriately. There is inconsistency in the use of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. In less effective lessons a lack of pace led to inattention and low-level disruption. In general, however, behaviour has improved considerably and is now of a high standard in classrooms facilitating more effective learning.

Assessments systems have been further improved and are better understood by pupils and teachers. However, they are not yet fully embedded into the practice of the school. Further refinements are planned for September. The quality of marking and written feedback has improved significantly. Some excellent use of level descriptors and target setting was seen particularly relating to the recently introduced half-termly assessment tasks.

A more inclusive and responsive curriculum is planned for September. The school's specialism in the performing arts will be embedded further in the curriculum through a new Year 7 dance course and cross-curricular initiatives. A supportive 'golden curriculum' is planned to better meet the needs of a small group of Year 7 pupils. High attaining pupils in Year 9 can study a second foreign language and a fast track GCSE course in music. A wider range of courses includes ICT and BTec sport at Key Stage 4 and AS level courses in film studies and systems and control. An alternative curriculum, with accreditation, is being implemented for pupils in Year 10. Together with the increasing number of 'enterprise days' this will contribute to work-related learning. Vocational education in the sixth form remains limited. Plans are in place for literacy to be taught more systematically. Similar work for numeracy is awaited. Significant structural changes have taken place which should improve support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The projected staffing and timetable

changes should enable the curriculum to be taught more effectively with less reliance on supply teachers.

The quality of care, guidance and support continues to improve steadily. Key post-holders have a clearer remit and sharper accountability for developing, monitoring and evaluating a range of appropriate systems and initiatives. Concerns over health and fire safety are being tackled systematically. Pupils speak appreciatively of the new CCTV system and the greater visibility of staff on duty in helping them feel safe. A wide range of well conceived strategies has been devised to target and support pupils from their earliest experiences of secondary education. The new inclusion panel is enabling staff to build up a more in-depth profile of pupils' needs and work more collaboratively to address them. Managers are beginning to use data better to establish tracking systems, to identify groups and direct support, for example, towards underachieving boys.

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

improve the quality of teaching, by ensuring students receive challenging and interesting tasks - good

The sixth form

There continues to be satisfactory progress in the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form. This is likely to be further enhanced in September by: the completion of building renovation with improved facilities for independent study; the implementation of improved management and administrative systems; better procedures for care and guidance; and the introduction of new subjects in the curriculum. Induction and taster days have led to an increased number of applications this year reversing a three-year downward trend in numbers. The ambition to be an inclusive sixth form is now better informed by clearer entry criteria both to the sixth form itself and onto specific courses.

Students welcome the introduction of an enhanced tutorial system, designed to improve attendance and punctuality as well as providing a daily forum for intelligent discussion and effective counselling from committed personal tutors. The tutorial sessions observed were very effective; students enjoy being part of the community, and commented favourable on recent improvements. Students take responsibility in the school - in mentoring younger pupils, for example, and, from September, in a new prefect system - as well as in organising many of their own social activities including a Year 12 visit to Alton Towers. A fuller evaluation of the impact of these changes should be possible in the autumn term.

The sixth form is now well led and managed. There is better monitoring and evaluation of teaching and departmental performance, and students are well supported through the systematic tracking of their progress against clear targets. They value the helpful counselling in respect of careers and university applications. There is good additional support for students at risk of failure, helped by increasingly early diagnosis of problems. External links with other schools and colleges have been made to enhance provision although these are hindered by timetable and other

logistical issues. The school makes good use of visiting speakers. The small size of the sixth form means that enterprise, collaboration and creativity are required to increase the breadth of subjects, levels and enrichment experience which can be offered.

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

in the sixth form:

ensure students receive adequate guidance on their choice of courses - good

Leadership and management

The arrival of the new deputy headteacher and the restructuring of the senior management team have increased the capacity of the team to lead and manage the school. Roles and responsibilities have been clearly defined along with accountability structures. The extension of senior management team meetings to include the director of specialism and other middle managers is well conceived, providing wider consultation, increased transparency, development opportunities and improved communication. The headteacher has now established himself in the school, having won the confidence of staff and pupils and gives strong leadership with clear direction in moving the school forward. There has been rapid progress since the previous monitoring inspection visit in March.

Good progress has been made in empowering subject leaders and other middle managers to monitor work within their areas more rigorously. This has come about through clarifying expectations, supported by appropriate training, and through the quality assuring of their work. For example there is increasing confidence in using criteria to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning when observing lessons.

An executive officer has been appointed to line manage the work of the non-teaching staff. A critical review of management systems and their employment terms has resulted in clearer leadership and accountability for non-teaching staff as well as some financial savings. The control of the school's finances is now on a sounder footing following the appointment of a bursar. The school is budgeting to repay its £200,000 deficit over the next two years. This deficit is of concern to all, including governors and the local authority, but reducing the deficit is considered secondary to the priority of raising attainment such that special measures would no longer be required. The governors continue to provide the school with good support and challenge. This appears set to continue with the proactive management of a number of appointments and reappointments envisaged over the next few months.

The school's specialist status as a performing arts college is now a stronger feature within the whole school. The director of specialism is co-opted onto the senior management team, a head of music is now in place, and there has been increased emphasis on drama and dance alongside the successful work in music. Consequently performing arts are now better positioned to make an impact on the work of the whole school, although critical evaluation of the anticipated learning gains for pupils is essential for these cross-curricular links to be effective.

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

provide more support to teachers in dealing with students - good

ensure that senior staff set better role models for their colleagues - good

identify weaknesses more rigorously and deal with them more quickly - satisfactory

to meet statutory requirements:

Issue	Response
draw up and implement policies for racial equality and race relations	The school has made satisfactory progress but is now fully compliant following the governors' ratification of the policies. This is no longer a key issues and will not be reported on separately in subsequent visits
teach the requirements of the National Curriculum in ICT and citizenship;	The school has made satisfactory progress and is fully compliant for citizenship and will be fully compliant for ICT from September 2006.

External support

The LA's continued involvement in supporting the school and monitoring its progress is proving effective. The authority has encouraged and facilitated links with other schools, helped with training of teachers who have leadership and management responsibilities, and has contributed towards the newly appointed advanced skills teacher.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

The school has addressed the additional priorities identified in the previous inspection visit. These developments have been commented on throughout this letter. No additional priorities are identified, although it is important that: the new assessment systems and curriculum are swiftly embedded from September; newly qualified teachers starting in September are suitably supported; and that there is continuing attention to the consistency of marking and differentiation in lessons to meet the needs of high attaining pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Mick Blaylock
H M Inspector