



10 July 2006

Ms R Totton
Headteacher
Whitby Community College
Prospect Hill
Whitby
North Yorkshire
YO21 1LA

Dear Ms Totton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WHITBY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Christopher Keeler HMI to your college on 6 and 7 July 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures in October 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 five parts of lessons and one assembly, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other nominated staff, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA), and spoke with pupils.

Context

This visit coincided with the start of the new academic year at the school following the induction of the new Year 10, earlier in the week. The inspection focused on the two areas for improvement that relate to monitoring and evaluation and the role of leaders and managers at all levels. Achievement and standards, personal development and well-being and quality of provision were not evaluated on this visit.

Leadership and management

Following the first monitoring visit, the headteacher has led a review of the action plan to tackle areas for improvement, in consultation with staff at all levels and the LA. This has resulted in a more streamlined and prioritised plan, which sets out actions and anticipated outcomes in a more realistic timescale. A cycle for self-evaluation and planning has also been introduced to underpin school improvement and the senior leadership team has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college as a result of regular monitoring.

Senior staff understand their roles and responsibilities as managers and how they can contribute to the college improvement plan. However, their skills as proactive leaders are less well developed. A strategic overview is emerging at senior level, but a few middle leaders are still working in isolation and do not have a good understanding of how their work contributes to the plan. This is not helped by some remaining confusion about their role in the new staffing structure. The extended leadership group, which includes the directors for learning, is in its early stages of development; the planned meeting schedule for September is designed to increase the contribution of all staff to school improvement and embed roles of accountability.

Middle managers have received good support from the LA. As a result, most have a clearer understanding of their role and are making a significant contribution to school improvement. Skills in self-evaluation by middle leaders are developing well; areas requiring improvement have been identified and plans prepared to address them. An increased awareness of their relative strengths has enabled expertise to be shared and developed more effectively. However, not all middle managers understand fully their role as leaders. A few are content to defer accountability to senior managers rather than to assume responsibility for their subject area.

The evaluation of teaching undertaken by the senior management team and subject leaders is accurate. Deficiencies are identified and appropriate support given. Teachers' planning has improved; lessons are structured and, in most cases, make clear reference to differentiated learning outcomes. This has resulted in more focused and purposeful teaching. The use of learning area meetings as a forum to improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement has proved popular with teachers, who have appreciated the chance to share good practice and develop further, their own teaching styles.

Lesson observations reflect the impact of this, and judgements by school leaders and the LA indicate that the overall quality of teaching is improving.

Decisive action has been taken to improve the ethos for learning. It is a key component in the drive to raise standards. Teaching staff are fully supportive of the steps introduced, such as the policy with regard to school dress and zero tolerance toward inappropriate behaviour. A common code of expectations in the classroom has been introduced, and is reinforced regularly, for example through assemblies. However, as with all policies, there is a difference between support and consciously working as a team in order to realise a successful outcome. Some staff are not implementing school policy and this is getting in the way of progress. There remains an urgent need to win over 'hearts and minds'. An increasing number of staff, including middle leaders are supportive of the senior leadership, and instrumental in bringing about improvement. However, closer monitoring at all levels of management is required to ensure a consistent and corporate approach to change. Staff have appreciated the increased presence of the headteacher and senior staff around the school. The headteacher recognises the importance for her to establish a highly visible profile with students in order to reinforce the key messages that underline a positive ethos for learning.

The governing body, strengthened by the appointed additional governors, asks appropriate questions about the school's progress, informed by helpful reports from the headteacher. The chair recognises, however, that an audit of governors' skills would be helpful in identifying training needs, as a step towards increasing the overall effectiveness of the group.

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

- ensure that governors and senior managers produce accurate and objective evaluations that reflect reality – satisfactory progress
- implement and monitor management strategies more rigorously to ensure all pupils achieve as well as they should – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA has provided targeted and valued support to improve the quality of teaching, to develop positive behaviour management and to increase the

capacity of leadership and management, with particular reference to middle leaders. Wisely, the LA has reduced the level of support to heads of department to enable them to take greater responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of their subject areas, although the LA is maintaining an overall monitoring role. The LA's offer to strengthen the capacity of the senior leadership team through the possible addition of a seconded member of staff has been welcomed by the school.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since the last visit - satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to negotiation with the lead inspector.

Priorities for further improvement

- Embed the initiative on the ethos for learning so that positive outcomes are manifest in lessons.
- Develop leadership skills at all levels to embed a strategic overview across the school and drive improvement with rigour and energy.

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

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
H M Inspector