



7 December 2006

Mr G Wright  
The Headteacher  
Wardle High School  
Birch Road  
Wardle  
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Dear Mr Wright

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WARDLE HIGH SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Marianne Young HMI and Additional Inspectors Christine Harrison, Judith Tolley, Christopher Griffin and Ronald Bulman to your school on 5 and 6 December 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of students, the chair of the governing body and representatives of the local authority (LA). A total of 40 part lessons, two assemblies and 14 registration periods were observed.

### Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in July 2006 12 new teachers, nine of whom are newly qualified, have taken up post.

## Achievement and standards

Test and examination results in 2005 showed that standards were too low and students were underachieving. The 2006 results are not yet validated and there are no secure national comparators. Nevertheless, the school has sufficient data to show the satisfactory progress it has made in raising standards and improving achievement.

In the 2006 Key Stage 3 national tests, results were better than those for 2005, notably for higher-attaining students. Students with statements of special educational need also achieved particularly well. These results indicate broadly satisfactory achievement overall. Students made better progress in mathematics than they did in English, a reversal of the situation in 2005. A special event involving parents in preparations for Key Stage 3 tests has been used successfully, alongside other incentives, to persuade students to try harder.

All aspects of the GCSE results in 2006 showed a significant improvement on those for 2005. Students did particularly well in English and mathematics. Results in science for both Year 9 and Year 11 remain a cause for concern and students do not make as much progress as they should. The school is working hard to remedy this situation: staffing difficulties have been resolved, teaching is improving and the successful leadership in mathematics and English has been used to encourage new initiatives in science. Nevertheless, students' attitudes to science are still not as good as they are to other subjects.

The impact of the school's specialism in performing arts on standards and achievement across the school is limited, though these subjects do provide additional opportunities for students to achieve in extra-curricular activities.

The school's monitoring of students' progress has improved over the last two terms and is now good. Targets are realistic and students are assessed regularly in all subjects. There are good arrangements for collecting assessment information, identifying any underachievement and then providing additional support where necessary. Students are now aware of their target grades or levels and teachers are increasingly involving students in discussions about how to reach the next level. English and history provide examples of really valuable feedback, both written and spoken, giving detailed advice to students.

## Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development and well-being continue to improve. The school is generally calm and orderly. Most students move around sensibly, although not all of them move punctually to lessons. Behaviour and attitudes to learning have improved and are now good. Nonetheless, there are some

instances of misbehaviour in lessons and this disrupts learning. However, this is decreasing because more teachers are able to deal with incidents effectively when they arise. The number of fixed-term exclusions has decreased since the previous visit and there have been no permanent exclusions. However, the high proportion of exclusions for Year 8 boys is a concern. The school has monitored the reasons for this and is working with a number of agencies to reintegrate these students into lessons.

Since the previous visit, attendance in Years 7 to 11 has improved and is now 93.1%, above the national average. However, two tutor groups in Year 11 have an average attendance this term of less than 90%. Attendance is much improved in the sixth form and is 92.5%. One reason for the improvement in attendance is that new monitoring systems facilitate rigorous analysis of absences and accurate targeting of support. Students themselves are realising the importance of regular attendance.

Students' spiritual development is not as strong as their social and cultural development because relevant opportunities are missed, especially during form time. Too often teachers fail to give sufficient attention and emphasis to the 'thought for the day', restricting opportunities for quiet reflection.

Students told inspectors that they enjoy wearing their new uniforms and appreciate the rewards policy. Many have a strong sense of pride in the school and take their roles and responsibilities, for instance as prefects and buddies, very seriously. The school council works satisfactorily to improve the quality of school and represent the students' views. Many students recognise the improvements in the ethos of the school that enable them to benefit from their lessons, feel safe and enjoy the range of opportunities provided for them.

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

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

### Quality of provision

Since the monitoring visit in July the school has sustained its focus on improving teaching and learning under the assured leadership of an assistant headteacher, well supported by a director of learning. Good procedures to increase challenge are having an impact, although not yet with full consistency. The proportion of lessons that were good or better – just below six in ten – was broadly in line with the July figure, although there were fewer outstanding lessons. Five lessons were inadequate, a higher figure than in July, due to a range of factors. These include a slow pace of learning

caused by weaknesses in time management, low teacher expectations leading to a lack of challenge, too much talking by teachers so depriving students of opportunities to explore and apply their learning, and an overuse of closed questions that discourage extended and more thoughtful responses. Nevertheless, the consistency in the proportion of lessons that are good or better indicates that the school's initiatives are embedding improvements. There is a consistent 'house style' in planning lessons that are driven by clear learning objectives. The emerging technique of breaking down lessons into shorter units of time adds good pace and purpose to most lessons. Pace is also evident in the rapid and highly interactive style of questioning adopted in many lessons which draws out contributions from most students. The use of a more progressively open form of questioning to develop the students' deductive reasoning is emerging but is not yet secure.

The school's efforts to improve marking and assessment are increasingly effective. Better and more consistent use is made of grade or level criteria to assess standards as well to set targets for improvement. Oral feedback to students during most lessons is good. In English, written feedback consistently points out strengths and targets for improvement. A consistent feature in the most successful lessons is the way students are enabled to work independently, enhancing their learning through tasks that explicitly draw on their skills of analysis and creativity.

The school employs nine newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Their professional development benefits from a comprehensive support programme that deals with teaching, learning, and pastoral and administrative matters. All NQTs have a subject-based induction mentor whose guidance they value. Overall, leadership of their induction is good. They understand the principle that, in common with other staff, they are 'expected to move the pupils on'.

The school has implemented the curriculum developments noted at the time of the last visit. The statutory requirements for information and communication technology (ICT) are now being met. Key Stage 3 offers new courses such as dance in Year 7: this complements other elements of provision for the progress group. The distinct provision for these vulnerable pupils is smoothing their transition from primary school effectively. The fast-tracking of students in music, religious studies and technology subjects is working well and allows study for extra GCSE qualifications. Vocational and alternative options in Key Stage 4 are more flexible and further personalisation is envisaged. Specially tailored provision, including accredited courses, caters well for students at risk of disaffection. They are provided for in school as far as possible, with reference to external agencies when required. Many students and some primary school pupils benefit from involvement in concerts, productions and competitions. Enrichment opportunities range from sport and outdoor activities to television appearances and links with the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. There is increased emphasis on developing the talents of the most able.

Innovations in care, guidance and support are continuing to take effect. Recently established staff responsibilities for planning and provision for groups or individuals have been firmly assigned. There are more mentors and support staff and their training has increased, enabling more individual contact, accurate targeting and personalised guidance of students. A thoughtfully planned, well staffed transition programme in partner primary schools gets pupils off to a good start in Year 7. Students' personal organisation is promoted by back-up arrangements at the start of each school day. In Year 9 a consultation day allows students and their parents to receive detailed and specific guidance about the academic, vocational and alternative options available in Key Stage 4. Students feel that the school is now a safe and healthy place and appreciate the wide choice of wholesome food options. Concerns over health and fire safety have now been completely resolved.

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

- improve the quality of teaching by ensuring students receive challenging and interesting tasks – satisfactory.

#### The sixth form

The recently published analysis of the 2006 results in the sixth form indicates that the downward trend in standards has been arrested. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory. Most students reached or exceeded their targets in A2 examinations but a small proportion did not achieve as well as expected. There remains considerable inconsistency across subjects.

The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is satisfactory and leads to satisfactory achievement overall. In the more effective lessons students are given opportunities to explore ideas for themselves, work collaboratively and present their ideas to others. In these situations students achieve well and take responsibility for their learning. However, in too many lessons opportunities for students to do this are limited so they are passive recipients of information rather than independent learners. When this is the case, it does not prepare them well for the next stage in their learning.

The renovation of the sixth form area is complete, and independent study and social areas are now used effectively. Students have some periods of supervised study; this has been successful in not only helping them to establish routines and meet deadlines, but also in accessing support and guidance from teachers. Students' attitudes towards learning are positive and they take their study periods seriously. Students appreciate the improved facilities and have a real sense of belonging to the sixth form community.

The enhanced tutorial system is now well established and well organised. Students benefit from regular one-to-one meetings with personal tutors, and receive effective support and guidance in dealing, for example, with university applications and career choices as well as everyday problems.

The sixth form is well led and managed. There has been good progress in establishing effective procedures and systems for the smooth day-to-day running of the sixth form. Induction procedures are effective in ensuring that students can make well informed choices about courses in the sixth form, and pastoral support systems are effective. The sixth form now has a clear identity and makes a valuable contribution to the main school, for example through the growing involvement of sixth form students in decision making and in helping younger students. New courses in film studies and systems and control in Year 12 are now established and the take-up is good. Students' progress is tracked by subject teachers and personal tutors and those at risk of failure are identified and given appropriate additional support. However, procedures are not robust enough to eradicate underachievement or to improve the quality of teaching for the sixth form and ensure consistency across subjects.

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

- in the sixth form ensure students receive adequate guidance on their choice of courses – good.

## Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to provide resolute and determined leadership to the school. He has melded senior leaders into an effective team, working with increasing initiative to deliver their distinct responsibilities. In addition, he is working assiduously to develop leadership capacity across the school, making effective use of regular meetings for well targeted staff training. The expansion of the senior team is helping both to distribute responsibilities and to cultivate leadership skills among a wider group of staff. In some instances, the new positions allocated to non-teaching staff have increased support for senior and middle leaders, enabling them to adopt a more strategic approach to their roles. More streamlined and effective management systems across a range of areas are also contributing to this. The revised arrangements for managing the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are proving effective.

Increasingly, middle leaders are discharging the full range of their responsibilities. Building effectively on appropriate training, this term subject leaders have played a successful part in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. This has contributed to the school's accurate evaluations of its strengths and weaknesses, on which appropriate priorities

for action are founded. Measures to address these are well considered, systematic and guided by thorough, staged implementation plans. For instance, support for improving teaching and learning is carefully directed to particular areas of weakness and matched to the needs of individuals. However, insufficient attention has been paid in the sixth form to evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and learning, which remains pedestrian.

The school's specialist status in performing arts is playing an increasing part in enriching and enlivening the curriculum. An example of this is the recent themed day when all lessons had a link with *Oliver Twist*. However, the overall impact of the performing arts on the school's provision remains fragmented.

The school has worked hard and to good effect to develop regular and productive opportunities for communicating with parents. The school's website is proving a popular source of information, while the headteacher's fortnightly Saturday morning surgeries are regularly used by parents to discuss matters regarding their children. Termly forums keep parents abreast of the school's improvements and allow regular opportunities for discussing concerns.

The governing body, very ably led by the chair, maintains a strong focus on raising standards and improving provision for students. Governors meet regularly, not only to deal with the normal business of the school, but also to evaluate progress towards the removal of special measures. The school is benefiting considerably from the range of relevant experience governors bring to their roles. This has proved very valuable in the development of a realistic financial plan to eradicate the school's significant deficit.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 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 – good.

To meet statutory requirements:

Teach the requirements of the National Curriculum in ICT. The school has made satisfactory progress and is fully compliant for ICT. This is no longer an area for improvement and will not be reported on separately in subsequent visits.

## External support

Rightly, in response to the school's increasing capacity to lead and sustain the improvements required, the LA has reduced its direct support to the school. This term the focus of its work has been on monitoring and evaluating progress. This has been accompanied by training for staff in developing the understanding and skills required to take on full responsibility for this process. Helpfully, the LA's staff have also assisted with the moderation of judgements.

## Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

## Priorities for further improvement

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that there are no inadequate lessons
- implement an effective system for tracking the progress of sixth form students in order to eliminate underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services for Rochdale and the Local Learning and Skills Council.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Jane Austin  
H M Inspector