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22 November 2006

Mr Mark Keary
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Dear Mr Keary

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BETHNAL GREEN TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Patricia Robson HMI, and Additional Inspectors Jennifer Hall and Kiran Campbell-Platt, to your school on 8 and 9 November 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 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 the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other teachers, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the LA.

Context

At the time of the last visit the new headteacher had just taken up the post. Since then there have been substantial changes to the senior leadership team.

Achievement and standards

In 2006 attainment at Year 11 fell to below 30% 5 A*-C GCSE passes from 35% in 2005. The average uncapped total points score fell by almost 30 points. However, a higher proportion of students gained 5 GCSE A*-C including English and Maths than in 2005. Inconsistent achievement between subjects has been evident for the past two years. At Year 9, the previous year's improvement in English attainment was not sustained and the number of students gaining at least level 5 fell back from 64% in 2005 to 48%. Attainment rose slightly in mathematics and stayed static in science.

The school's targets for 2006 were not met for either key stage and standards remain well below the national average. The 2006 examination results reflect the legacy of underachievement.

The headteacher's vision for the school led to strategic appointments to the leadership team in September, including a co-ordinator for raising achievement. With support from the local authority (LA) consultant, the school is developing the staff's capacity to make more effective use of achievement data to drive up standards. The best middle managers investigate underachievement rigorously and share information in order to improve provision across the school. These developments enhance the school's capacity to improve achievement but the progress made in this area has not yet impacted upon examination results. School evaluations of impact are also at an early stage.

Students make better progress in lessons because the proportion of inadequate teaching has declined. The school needs to fully embed the new culture of high expectations and accountability among all staff so that standards improve consistently across the school.

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

- Raise standards of student achievement – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

The progress made since the last monitoring visit in students' personal development, and in the development of a more harmonious environment, is outstanding. So many students from all years told inspectors how much behaviour has improved, and that they feel safe. They told inspectors that

they now have a much greater say in how the school is run. They consider that their relationships with teachers are much improved. Students also told inspectors of their increased participation in the life of the school, as prefects, mentors, council members, librarians, and governors, for example. These opportunities have significantly developed their confidence and self-esteem, their public speaking skills, and their mediation skills to resolve conflicts that in the past may have developed into racial disputes.

There is a settled and purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Movement around the school is orderly although unsupervised football at lunchtime can be rather boisterous. The reduction in 'referrals' for poor behaviour supports the judgement that behaviour has improved. Behaviour has improved enormously. Whilst incidents of bullying still exist they are now dealt with more effectively. Arrangements to support students at risk of exclusion through the pastoral support programme have been strengthened. Exclusion numbers are running as high as last year, but this reflects the recent greater consistency in behaviour management, and lower tolerance of bad behaviour. The calm and orderly departure from school at the end of the day is a tribute to the students' respect for each other, and to the work of the staff and the police.

The recruitment of new staff to improve attendance is too recent to have had an impact on attendance figures, but liaison with parents has already improved. Attendance remains below, but close to, those of most schools. Punctuality to school is carefully monitored and is improving. Students generally enjoy coming to school, but inevitably some enjoy school more than others. A Year 7 student told inspectors 'I just like learning, I like group activities'. A Year 11 student said 'I enjoy being at school because different ages and cultures are now mixing' 'Different races are getting on within every year group'. Students enjoy the fact that now behaviour has improved teachers are more willing to let them work in groups, helping to make learning more interesting. Students complain about the poor toilet facilities.

Students report that the food at lunchtime has improved. Since the introduction of healthy food options and the availability of water there are fewer referrals for poor behaviour.

Students appreciate the increased emphasis on security in school but want the role of the security staff to be clarified. The reputation of the school in

the local community is improving. As a result students have found, for the first time, work placements in local nursery schools.

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

- Raise standards of student behaviour and offer a more harmonious and cohesive community for all students – outstanding progress

Quality of provision

There has been satisfactory progress in the priorities for improvement identified in the previous monitoring visit. Regular and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning is in place. This has effectively reduced the percentage of inadequate teaching. Training has been provided for teachers and teaching assistants to support them in meeting the needs of students with English as an additional language.. These initiatives are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning which was satisfactory or better in all the lessons observed. Around half the lessons observed were good and one lesson was outstanding. There is greater consistency now in sharing lesson objectives and explaining important vocabulary and concepts at the beginning of lessons. Therefore students, including those for whom English is a second language, are clearer about what is expected of them and make progress in learning new vocabulary. Teachers are more effective in using a range of methods to motivate and engage students, for example, using group and pair work. They give positive feedback and make frequent checks on learning. Behaviour management is consistently applied so that lessons proceed smoothly. Pupils are attentive and remain on task throughout lessons. In the more effective lessons, work is well matched to students' learning needs and prior knowledge.

Overall, there is insufficient use made of assessment information for planning to meet the needs of the different groups of pupils in classes. Although teachers make a note of the different groups of pupils on lesson plans, there are inconsistencies in the extent to which they plan sufficiently well for meeting their needs. This has a particular impact on the learning of higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. In some lessons, for example, the work for least able students did not hold their attention. Raising the level of challenge for most able students during the course of lessons is not well developed.

In a small proportion of lessons where teaching was less secure, teachers did not question students skilfully enough to draw out their learning and sometimes did not give them enough time to answer, so they were not aware of students' misconceptions and difficulties. Methods of questioning do not fully reflect the higher potential of some groups of pupils. In some lessons teachers spend too long talking and not always with clarity. There is a loss of pace and challenge when teachers do not explain tasks clearly enough and do not check if students have understood before proceeding to the next activity.

Marking remains an area of weakness. Monitoring of work and marking is taking place in faculties but this has not yet resulted in consistent and good quality assessment. There are inconsistencies in the regularity with which students' work is marked. Generally there is a lack of constructive and developmental comments which would help students to learn how they can improve their work. Lower attainers' books have too much incomplete work which is often poorly presented. Some teachers comment on this but do not follow this up. Target setting is undeveloped and inconsistent.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning for all pupils especially those who need support and those who require greater challenge – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The impact of the new headteacher is clear to see. Students, teachers and external agencies are able to explain the difference made to the climate and culture of the school since his arrival. Urgent action has been taken to raise the quality of teaching and learning which has resulted in a steep decline in the proportion of inadequate lessons. Robust action has been taken to improve behaviour so that visitors describe the school as feeling 'normal'. Both priorities for improvement in the last monitoring letter have been addressed with urgency and improvements in student's personal development and well-being have been outstanding.

The post Ofsted action plan has been rewritten and provides a very clear action plan for improvement with easily measurable steps. Actions are identified and monitored well. New appointments to the senior leadership team are proving very effective.

There remain inconsistencies in middle leadership. For example while middle managers have received training on the use of data, they have not received training in other aspects of departmental self evaluation so there are inconsistencies in departmental audits. Students with English as an additional language receive satisfactory support, but the identification and support of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is less effective.

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

- Leaders and managers need to recognise urgently the weaknesses and identify the immediate priorities and direction for the school – good progress
- Produce a clear action plan for improvement, the success of which can be measured and evaluated – good progress

External support

The local authority (LA) continues to provide a range of support. For example providing fortnightly training to all staff in teaching skills where students have English as an additional language.. The LA is committed to continuing to support the school until and beyond it's removal from special measures.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed

Priorities for further improvement

- The identification and management of students with learning difficulties and disabilities
- Increasing the proportion of lessons that are at least good
- Using data to more consistently raise achievement and identify underachievement

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
H M Inspector