



1 November 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, and Bernard Jones and Mike Driver, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 31 October and 1 November, 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, observed a senior leadership group meeting and met with the headteacher and other nominated staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

### Context

Following the previous visit an associate deputy headteacher from a neighbouring school was seconded to the college in September to work with the senior leadership group for one year. There have also been a number of staff changes and new appointments, including two newly qualified teachers (NQTs) by arrangement with the lead inspector.

## Achievement and standards

Standards attained by pupils remain broadly average. In the examinations taken by Year 11 pupils in 2006 the proportion of pupils gaining five A\* to C grades at GCSE rose slightly. Given the pupils' relative starting points these results indicate an improvement in pupils' achievement compared with the previous year. Nevertheless, challenging targets were not met and a legacy of previous underachievement remains.

The school recognises that a wide variation still exists in the performance between subjects and different groups of pupils. The number of pupils achieving the expected levels in English and mathematics increased as a result of close monitoring by subject leaders and the LAs support. Conversely, the performance of pupils in some technology courses remained well below expectations. Girls achieved better than boys and the group of gifted and talented pupils met or exceeded their targets. However, actions to support and track the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have not been sufficiently rigorous to ensure their sustained progress. As a result not all achieved as well as they should.

Short-term intervention strategies have proved effective in increasing the achievement of small targeted groups of pupils. However, a strategic whole-school approach to setting targets and tracking progress made by pupils to raise achievement throughout Key Stage 4 is not fully embedded. Ongoing records of pupils' attainment are readily available to inform teachers' planning but are not used consistently by all teachers to match activities to pupils' needs. As a result not all pupils make the progress that they might in lessons.

In the sixth form rigorous tracking and action to tackle underachievement as part of the tutor intervention support programme has raised expectations and established a more positive ethos for learning. Unvalidated data from the 2006 examinations indicates that most students achieved or exceeded the expected levels based on their prior attainment overall, with boys performing better than girls. This reverses a three year trend of decline and underachievement.

## Personal development and well-being

In Years 10 and 11 pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally satisfactory but further action is required to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential. Many teachers work hard to plan lessons that meet the learning needs of all pupils and engage them in their learning through stimulating and challenging activities. In these lessons, behaviour is at least satisfactory and often good. However, in some lessons, work is not suitably matched to learning needs. As a result a minority of pupils, boys and girls, lose interest and become too easily distracted or distracting. Their behaviour in these lessons is unacceptable and those pupils who are eager to learn resent the disruption. Common features of poor behaviour include shouting out inappropriate

comments, talking with other pupils when the teacher is addressing the class, disrespectful responses to questions and a range of attention-seeking strategies designed to impress their peers. These incidents go unchallenged too often and, as a consequence, the quality of learning and the rate of progress in these lessons are reduced. The recently introduced policy for behaviour and rewards is helping to promote a more positive learning environment. Most teachers apply the policy successfully, although some inconsistencies remain in its implementation. This gives misleading messages to pupils about what constitutes acceptable conduct.

The behaviour management working group has been effective in formulating new systems to regulate pupils' behaviour. However, the implementation of these systems is not monitored as well as it could be by senior leaders, particularly in lessons where pupils are known to be challenging. Furthermore, senior leaders responsible for the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' behaviour have not fully grasped the relationship between the two elements or given sufficient leadership and support to staff to deal effectively with unacceptable conduct.

Pupils are conscious that the staff are determined to help them achieve higher grades in examinations through 'catch up' lessons and other specially organised activities. They appreciate the changes that have been made. As one pupil stated, 'I used to believe that it was all my fault when I could not understand things. Now teachers are helping me more and I feel better about myself.' A recent awards presentation at the Spa Pavilion was well received by pupils. Some found it aspirational, while others said that it made them feel proud of their college. This reflects a significant step forward in the creation of a positive ethos.

Students in the sixth form display good behaviour during lessons and as they move around school. The positive approach they bring to their studies, together with teaching that motivates and inspires students, has helped raise standards and achievement.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved significantly but this has not yet had the necessary impact on levels of achievement because of past weaknesses. The quality of learning and progress made by pupils generally reflect the quality of teaching, although in a small minority of lessons, progress lags behind. This is because of inappropriate attitudes and behaviour and work that is ill matched to pupils' needs. Where a positive climate for learning has been established pupils work productively and make at least the expected rate of progress.

Teachers are positive in their attitude to improving standards and levels of achievement. Staff, including NQTs, have valued the support provided. The sharing of good practice has stimulated teachers to review their own

approaches and has resulted in greater focus and purpose in lessons. Lessons are increasingly well planned, with a clear structure, together with a variety of activities to engage and meet the needs of a range of pupils. Teachers are keen to use new technology to promote better learning and there is systematic support to help them develop higher level skills, for example in the most effective use of interactive whiteboards. Use of information and communication technology is, however, restricted by the level of resources. Greater use is made of different methods of assessment to support learning. For example, pupils have more opportunities to use criteria to assess their own work and that of others, identify how improvements could be made and set their own targets for improvement. In weaker lessons the pitch and pace of the work are less demanding and, in a minority of cases, poor behaviour detracts from learning.

Monitoring confirms that variations in the quality of teaching and learning remain within and between subjects. Following a systematic audit to identify the range of good practice in relation to assessment, plans have been made to share strategies across all departments to ensure that all pupils understand what they need to do to improve and achieve their potential.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise the standards and achievement of all pupils – satisfactory progress.

### Leadership and management

The headteacher has provided satisfactory leadership in responding to the last report and implementing the college's action plan. This is founded on her understanding of where the college needs to develop, in order to be removed from special measures within the designated time. However, her long-term vision for the college's future development is less clear. The new staffing structure is becoming established. Increased capacity, provided by additional members of the senior leadership team, has enabled the college to focus more sharply on identified areas for improvement. Priorities for action reflect the senior leadership team's sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college, gained as a result of regular monitoring and evaluation.

Most senior staff have gained a better understanding of their roles in leading the college, which includes supporting middle managers in being more accountable for the standards in their subject areas. Senior and middle leaders are beginning to use assessment data and information about pupils' progress more systematically and consistently in order to identify and tackle underachievement. Good leadership of the sixth form has resulted in significant improvement in the standards and achievement of older students.

Directors of learning have increased the contribution of all staff to school improvement and reinforced middle managers' roles regarding their accountability. Most middle leaders have a good understanding of how their work contributes to the college's action plan and take greater responsibility for standards and achievement in their subject areas. Their skills in self-evaluation are developing well. Most have a good awareness of their relative strengths and areas requiring improvement. The evaluation of initiatives taken to raise standards is firmly on the agenda of middle managers and the senior colleagues to whom they are accountable.

Judgements made about the quality of teaching and learning by the senior management team and subject leaders are more focused and accurate, matching broadly those made by inspectors. The actions taken to improve the ethos for learning are beginning to have a positive impact. However, the college has not been as effective in improving the behaviour of a minority of students who interrupt the learning of others and contribute to underachievement in some lessons. This represents a barrier to improvement.

Governors are more prepared to challenge as well as support the headteacher and senior team. Following the appointment of additional members, to further strengthen capacity, the governing body is in a better position to hold the school to account for the standards produced and the quality of education provided.

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 taken a number of useful steps to support the growing capacity of leadership and governance. The capacity of senior leadership has been strengthened through the secondment of an associate deputy headteacher, and additional governors have been appointed with the help of the LAs officers to provide additional challenge in holding the school to account. The impact of support to improve the quality of teaching and learning has met with success in some subjects, but impact has been more variable in technology. The LA has supported the purchase of interactive whiteboards to increase the range of resources available to teachers. Local authority support has been reduced during the autumn term to allow the college to embed developing practice. The college awaits detailed feedback from the LAs most recent review in October.

## Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

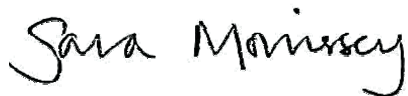
Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to agreement by the lead inspector.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the behaviour and attitudes of the small minority of pupils who are adversely affecting the progress of themselves and others.
- Strengthen the quality of senior leadership further in order to increase the capacity for improvement, especially at Key Stage 4.
- Reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning within and between subjects.
- Provide a clear strategic vision about the development of the college beyond special measures.

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