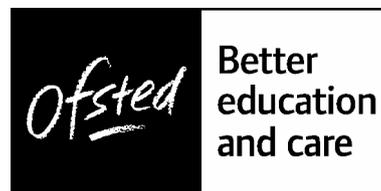


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11 December 2006

Mrs S Chesterton
The Acting Headteacher
Trentham High School
Allerton Road
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Stoke-on-Trent
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Dear Mrs Chesterton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF TRENTHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Raye Allison-Smith, John Carnaghan and Charlotte Evers, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29 and 30 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2006.

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, the chair of governors, groups of pupils formally and informally, senior and middle managers and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Following the previous inspection, the headteacher and chair of governors resigned. An experienced headteacher had been working alongside the headteacher prior to this and she has been seconded to the school for the foreseeable future. A new chair of governors was appointed in September. A number of teaching and support posts were unfilled at the time of the last inspection. Most of these have now been filled. A consultant deputy

headteacher helps support the senior leadership team, all of whom were in post at the time of the previous inspection. In January, the team is due to be enlarged with the addition of a further assistant headteacher and the inclusion of the subject leaders for English and mathematics, with specific whole-school roles.

Achievement and standards

Standards in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in 2006 were slightly improved over those in 2005 and close to average. However, these pupils entered the school with standards that are above average and the school's analysis of their progress shows that there was still widespread underachievement, especially in English and science. Nevertheless, the latest internal assessments for pupils currently in Year 9 show some improvements in progress in English.

Standards in GCSE examinations fell markedly in 2006 on all measures, falling short of national and local averages. This again represents considerable underachievement by all groups.

Personal development and well-being

Teachers are good role models and demonstrate their respect and concern for pupils through their day to day interactions. In the most effective lessons, pupils are encouraged to actively participate, for example, by listening to one another, responding to and asking questions, and by critically evaluating their own and others' work. Where lessons are well planned and behaviour is well managed, relationships are very positive and pupils are keen to learn. In such lessons, a strong 'work ethic' is fostering positive attitudes. However, some pupils are slow to take responsibility for their work and achievement and their attitudes are not as consistently positive as they should be.

Pupils play a leading part in assemblies and this sends positive messages to their peers. It also gives pupils a chance to develop their confidence and to be seen to take an active role in the school.

Systems for registering pupils' attendance are now more rigorous and systematic. This provides staff with a more accurate picture of attendance, with better quality information to help them monitor pupils' attendance alongside their academic achievement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- introduce a new 'work ethic' to the school through lessons and assemblies, with staff acting as positive role models – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are inconsistent. Nearly two-fifths of lessons seen were good or better but too many lessons fail to promote adequate learning and almost a third of lessons seen were inadequate. The school has initiated rigorous and accurate monitoring of both teaching and marking. It is starting to address areas of weakness and this is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of classroom practice. The school is now poised to improve the overall quality of teaching.

Significant training has been given to staff to develop strategies to promote cooperative learning. The outcomes of this initiative are varied. When teaching is good, pupils are encouraged to work together to discuss what they have learnt and to develop a better understanding of their standards in comparison with national expectations. Weaker teaching remains too heavily teacher led, affording too few opportunities to pupils to actively participate in their own learning.

Better teaching uses assessment information well to promote learning. In these lessons, the work set keeps pupils working at full stretch. They are engaged by such challenging work and the demands of meeting tight deadlines, and so they display positive attitudes. Learning is encouraged by regular work in pairs and small groups and numerous investigational activities. English and physical education are consistently well taught but most subjects deliver some less effective lessons. Where teaching is weak, the expectations of pupils are too low. Pupils are given little or no independence and all of them are expected to tackle the same work. This means that there is too little support for those with learning difficulties and insufficient challenge for the most able. When pupils show dissatisfaction with these inadequacies through becoming talkative, some teachers cannot effectively control this behaviour and lessons deteriorate.

The school has developed a thorough system of assessment which is beginning to provide it with valuable data about pupils' progress. It is starting to use this information to set targets for pupils and promote better teaching but, at this early stage, the impact it is having on teaching and pupils' achievement is limited.

Since the previous inspection, the long term monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress and achievement have improved. The system of recording data about pupils' progress enables the school to identify potential underachievement. Pupils are assessed regularly and staff have access to data on pupils' predicted targets, attainment and achievement. The recently appointed achievement managers have a clear overview of pupils' progress. This enables them, together with subject leaders and teachers, to provide guidance and support for pupils who are underachieving. The system is, however, relatively new, and hence the impact cannot as yet be assessed

fully. Since the previous inspection the school has appointed a member of staff with responsibility for careers advice but the access to the advice is not always sufficient to meet pupils' expectations.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- engage in professional development so teachers and managers increase their knowledge, skills and understanding of assessment, integrating these into more interactive teaching that stretches each individual pupil to the full – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Staff report that morale was low at the time of the last inspection and that sections of the school operated largely in isolation. There was no clear understanding of how good provision was, and staff in many areas felt that they were effective when they in fact were not. Since the appointment of the acting headteacher, staff have been reorganised. Senior leaders have been brought physically closer together and they now work much more closely with colleagues. Their profile in the school has been raised. Subject leaders say they now feel valued and part of a team. Expectations of them as members of the leadership team and as team leaders themselves are rigorous, but they have risen to the challenge. They appreciate the challenge and support they receive and speak of how they have been inspired and motivated to improve. New teaching methods, for example, have been welcomed and used with enthusiasm. Morale is much improved. However, significant improvement in achievement and teaching overall has yet to be secured.

The school has established effective ways of communicating with parents. There are now parents' evenings, such as those for pupils moving into the school and moving from Year 10 to Year 11. The Parents' Forum provides parents with good opportunities to set an agenda for, and contribute to, discussions about the development of the school. A small core of parents attends regularly. Communications with parents are now good, through the forum above, letters praising pupils or alerting parents to problems with their children's behaviour or progress, and through regular newsletters. Pupils' views are listened to, valued and acted upon appropriately. The links between the school and the local authority are now good.

The school's monitoring procedures are now effective and generally accurate judgements are being made about the quality of teaching across the school. Outcomes from the previous inspection and from this monitoring have been used to develop a new school improvement plan. Whilst this takes some account of stakeholders' views, particularly those of pupils, it is mainly the work of the senior leadership team. It is organised appropriately into development strands with responsibility for them being taken by senior leaders. This sound document includes appropriate actions to improve

teaching, learning and assessment, but its impact is not yet fully evident in observations of lessons and completed work.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- improve the quality of leadership and management. Inspire, motivate and influence staff, building effective and collaborative teams, so that rapid improvement is secured – satisfactory
- work more closely with stakeholders and the local community to build more confident and profitable partnerships – good
- establish and implement a school plan to improve achievement and standards, rigorously monitoring its progress to keep development on schedule – satisfactory.

External support

The school has received extensive and focused support from the local authority. This has included time from both its own advisory staff and other external consultants. Staff have welcomed this and appreciate it, feeling that there has been a positive impact on their practice as a result. However, there has not yet been a consistent impact in improving teaching and learning and raising standards and achievement across the whole school. The school improvement partner has visited the school and assisted effectively in the analysis of data and the school's needs.

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Further newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make better use of the assessment data available in school to ensure teaching is planned so that tasks challenge all pupils appropriately in lessons and progress and attitudes improve.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Ian Knight
Additional Inspector