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2 April 2007

Mr M Graham
Heysham High School
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Dear Mr Graham,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HEYSHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Geoff Henshall, Peter McKay and Andrew Henderson, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 28 and 29 March 2007, 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 December 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, other members of staff, and groups of students.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been no changes to staffing, which remains stable.

Achievement and standards

Standards of attainment in 2006 Key Stage 3 tests and in Key Stage 4 GCSE examinations were reported in the previous monitoring letter of December 2006.

The school has made good progress with actions to improve its position. Following analysis of pupils' performance in recent school tests and their current progress, senior staff are confident that standards at GCSE will improve further this year, and that around 30 per cent of the pupils will achieve five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. In addition, 90% of the current Year 11 pupils have already achieved a Level 2 GCSE grade B equivalent in functional English and mathematics through an adult literacy and numeracy accreditation. Improvements in the results of the Key Stage 3 national tests are also thought likely, based on the school's analysis of mock test results and the outcomes of regular teachers' assessments of current Year 9 performance. However, this is a more challenging target based on a small group of Year 9 students who are still underachieving, for example in English, as there remains a considerable amount of catching up to be done.

Progress made by pupils in lessons observed was directly related to the improving quality of teaching provided. Good or better progress was made in around 60% of lessons seen. In the remainder, progress was almost always satisfactory. The school acknowledges that its considerable efforts to improve achievement at Key Stage 4 must be matched by similar determination in Key Stage 3, for standards and achievement to reach expected levels throughout the school.

Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development has improved further since the last monitoring visit. Although a small number of students still find it difficult to meet the school's high expectations with regard to behaviour and readiness to learn, these are in the minority, and very few lessons are adversely affected by negative attitudes. Students themselves comment on the more positive climate for learning, and they appreciate the school's reward systems which provide an extra incentive to do the best they can. A number of students spoke enthusiastically about letters of praise, reward trips and their RAG (red, amber, green) ratings which are shared with parents and indicate whether they are on track to reach their academic and personal targets. Students say that effective sanctions are being used so that everyone understands the consequences of unsatisfactory behaviour, attendance or punctuality, and this motivates most students to try harder. They also feel that more enjoyable and challenging teaching is contributing to improvements in their personal development, and inspectors saw evidence of this in many lessons.

Every possible effort is being made to raise attendance and punctuality levels further through rigorous monitoring procedures that are applied consistently across the school, including in the sixth form. The achievements of particular year and form groups are monitored and reported in assemblies so that students can recognise and celebrate successes. At just over 92%, attendance has improved by more than 3% in the last two years and the school is no longer on the DfES list of those being monitored due to concerns about attendance. The school takes a similarly strong view on punctuality and monitors this closely, applying sanctions or rewards consistently, supporting vulnerable students and contacting parents where appropriate. As a result, the number of students late for school or for individual

lessons has greatly reduced, and none of the lessons observed by inspectors was affected by students arriving late. The impact of the school's good guidance and support for the minority who are persistent offenders can be seen in individual success stories where significant improvements have been made.

Better teaching is contributing to students' improving attitudes and confidence due to the planning of more opportunities to show their initiative, solve problems and think creatively.

Involvement in the Active Citizenship for Schools programme, through the school's Specialist Sports College status, has led to over 180 students across all year groups being trained as school leaders. This successful initiative is resulting in significant gains in students' levels of responsibility and self-confidence. It also reinforces the school's values, as the criteria for participation include the requirement for evidence of good behaviour and attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning have improved rapidly because the school has put in place a range of effective whole school initiatives together with strategies to support individual teachers. The school's own monitoring indicates that good progress has been made both in tackling the weaknesses and embedding the strengths identified at the previous visit, and inspectors gained evidence to support this view. Overall, teaching was good or better in two thirds of lessons observed; in the sixth form the proportion was three quarters. The number of lessons in which teaching was outstanding rose from one to six and no teaching was inadequate.

Such significant improvement has been enabled by the willingness of teachers as a body to embrace the changes in practice needed to inject lessons with a more widespread sense of challenge, engagement, and enjoyment. Lesson planning is much more consistent in providing tasks and activities which not only challenge students but also ensure they are much more actively involved and engaged in learning. Starter activities more routinely use prior learning to introduce learning objectives and inject a sense of pace and purpose. There are more opportunities for group and paired work, for discussion, and for students to evaluate their own performance. There is a much better balance between teacher input and students working independently and, in the best lessons, assuming some responsibility for organising their own learning. Interactive whiteboards are used with increasing proficiency by teachers and students to enhance learning. Concluding plenary sessions are more effective in helping students to remember what has been learned and to create a sense of achievement, though too often they are curtailed because of less effective time management. Above all, students feel that lessons have become more stimulating, interesting and fun - to be enjoyed rather than endured - because teachers are in general more prepared to be adventurous and take risks in how they plan and conduct lessons. As a result, more students show positive attitudes: improved behaviour and a climate more conducive to learning have increased their rate of progress.

Nevertheless, areas for improvement remain. Too many lesson plans lack clarity in setting clear objectives for what students are to learn and the outcomes by which they will demonstrate what they have learned. In planning and conducting lessons to provide varied and stimulating activities, teachers sometimes fail to maintain a sharp focus on learning; a consequent loss of rigour in promoting academic progress is not always offset by any gains in personal development. Whilst data is now used well to set targets and to track and monitor progress, there is not enough use of assessment information to set individual students short-term learning goals and guidance on how they can attain the standards expected of them. High quality marking has yet to become the norm across all areas. Good practice exists in these aspects but is not sufficiently well shared.

Since the previous monitoring visit the school has conducted a detailed audit of how the core subjects can contribute realistically to the cross-curricular development of information and communication technology (ICT) skills in Key Stage 4. Coupled with the programme of ICT-rich subjects provided in other parts of the curriculum, the audit has revealed that the vast majority of students have access to their full entitlement. This has provided a firm basis to develop further and ensure that all students benefit.

The school, with strong support in planning and tracking from the local authority, has implemented a detailed scheme to aid the progress of pupils for whom English is an additional language. Apart from recording progress in seven closely-graded steps of language acquisition, the school is also enhancing the integration of the students themselves by involving them in roles of responsibility.

The school's system for managing behaviour has allowed the pastoral support staff to become aware that some students, who are experiencing particular problems, do not necessarily appear on any list denoting learning difficulties and disabilities. This allows behavioural, emotional and external concerns to be identified and support to be provided proportionate to need.

Middle managers are beginning to take a lead in adapting the school's tracking system more appropriately to the needs of their particular department or faculty, thereby enhancing the availability and use of data.

The parent forum launched in January has conducted its first meeting with a full agenda, which focused on important issues. This has allowed the school to widen its base for consultation and listening to concerns. Lengthy discussion took place on homework, targets and grades, uniform changes and RAG ratings in tracking progress. Future discussions will centre on behaviour and disruptions, lunchtime arrangements and follow-up on progress ratings and homework.

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

- Improve teaching and learning by sharing good practice in order to eliminate unsatisfactory teaching and bring all lessons up to the quality of the best – good progress
- Establish more robust arrangements for setting pupils' challenging targets and for checking on their progress – good progress

Leadership and management

During this monitoring visit particular attention was paid to evaluating the quality of middle leadership. The effectiveness of the school's strategies for building its capacity for improvement can be seen in the increased confidence and skills of middle leaders. They have a good understanding of the school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its performance, and of their roles and responsibilities in contributing to this. Most middle leaders have an accurate view of the particular strengths or weaknesses in their departments, and clear priorities for improvement. Middle leaders are well supported and encouraged by the senior leadership team; there is a strong sense of whole-school teamwork.

The school's work on improving attendance, effectively led by a deputy headteacher and assistant pupil progress leaders, has been identified by the local authority as a model of good practice.

Sixth-form provision is improving at a rapid rate due to determined and effective leadership and management. There is a clear focus, not only on academic and vocational achievement, but also on personal development, responsibility, and making an effective contribution to the life of the school.

The improving profile of teaching and learning evident during this visit is testament to the hard work which teachers have put in to making lessons as interesting and varied as possible. Senior and middle leaders rightly emphasise this as being the key to raising standards and ensuring that the school continues on an upward trend.

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

- Improve the sixth form's leadership and management, particularly in relation to tracking student's progress and attendance so that underachievement can be identified and tackled at an early stage – good progress
- Strengthen management and monitoring systems in order to identify both how well the school is doing and what needs to be done to bring about improvement – good progress

External support

The local authority has recently carried out a review of progress in the school, which closely matches the findings of this monitoring visit. It has made a valuable contribution to the school's evaluation systems through a recent analysis of the quality of teaching and learning, carried out by a team of advisers. This review accurately identifies areas which can be fine-tuned to promote further development. Importantly, it also recognises the significant improvements being made which now offer a model of good practice to other schools wishing to develop good teaching strategies to increase students' enjoyment for learning.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

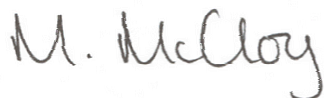
Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards and improve students' rate of progress in Key Stage 3.

I am copying this letter to the **Secretary of State**, the chair of governors and the Director of Education and Standards for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely



Marguerite McCloy
H M Inspector