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Mrs S Chesterton  
The Headteacher  
Trentham High School  
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Dear Mrs Chesterton

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF TRENTHAM HIGH SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Howard Dodd and Helen Barter, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 21 and 22 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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, senior leaders, groups of pupils and parents, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

### Context

Since the last monitoring visit in November 2006, there has been some turnover of staff. In particular, the senior leadership team has been enlarged by the appointment of a new assistant headteacher from January. Also from January, a new subject leader for English was appointed. She and the existing head of mathematics have joined the senior leadership team. At the time of the visit, one assistant headteacher and some other staff were absent

on long term sick leave and some posts continue to be covered by temporary or supply teachers, especially in science.

### Achievement and standards

Standards continue to be too low, as shown in the standards observed in lessons, but there are signs of improvement. The school now uses a rigorous system of tracking assessment outcomes for individuals and, summatively, for year groups. In Key Stage 3, this shows that progress is much improved in Years 7 and 8, although the progress of pupils in Year 9 is still too variable and not rapid enough overall. Progress in English and mathematics is much better than that in science in Year 9, although the difference is less marked in Year 8 and barely noticeable in Year 7. The school's estimates for the outcomes of National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in the summer reflect this with predictions in science lower than the outcomes in 2006 and well below the predictions in English and mathematics.

In Key Stage 4, the outcomes of modular tests taken in English, mathematics and science in preparation for GCSE show welcome signs of improvement. The school's predicted outcomes for GCSE examinations in the summer suggest some improvement over those in 2006, with the school getting closer to reaching its challenging targets.

### Personal development and well-being

In most lessons, the great majority of pupils cooperate readily with their teachers. The 'work ethic' is strongest when staff have positive working relationships with pupils and engage them through well planned work which meets their needs. Pupils confirm that this is the case and report that relationships between them and staff are now 'way better' than they were. Pupils enjoy greater opportunities to work together as pairs and groups and to share their ideas in brainstorming activities. They respond well, and with growing confidence, when they are asked to assess their own and other pupils' work.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Movement in corridors is generally calm because it is well supervised. Punctuality to lessons has improved as a result. The behaviour management system is well understood by pupils, although they report that it is not used consistently in all classes or subjects, and that those who behave well are not always rewarded. Parents also feel that this is the case. Nevertheless, pupils are familiar with the system for sanctions, know what to expect and, therefore, on the whole, behave in ways that avoid its implementation. Low level misbehaviour generally occurs only in those lessons which do not engage pupils' interest sufficiently. The best behaviour in lessons is seen where teachers show real enthusiasm and mutual respect is clear. This is repaid with swift cooperation, sustained attention, and high levels of motivation. The

improved approach to behaviour management and support for pupils is shown in the reducing number of fixed term exclusions and no permanent exclusions this term.

The more rigorous and systematic approach to improving attendance reported at the last monitoring visit has paid off. At 93%, attendance is now in line with the national average, although the school would like it to improve further so that it meets the 95% target. The school is now taking a more robust approach to term time holidays by not authorising absence to make clear to parents that this affects their children's learning.

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 – good.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. More teaching is now good but there is still too much that is inadequate. Inspectors' observations are in accord with the school's views.

The school has put into place a very thorough and rigorous system for regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in lessons and this is improving classroom practice. All staff have been given training to raise their awareness of a range of strategies to improve pupils' learning and many of these ideas are now being used effectively. For example, greater emphasis is now placed in making lessons more interactive, with pupils being encouraged to work in pairs or groups and discuss the concepts being taught. In the best lessons, interest is captured, for example, through the imaginative use of interactive whiteboards to present ideas and friendly competitions in mathematics. All teachers start lessons by explaining to pupils what they will learn, although checking how successful they have been at the ends of lessons is rather less consistent. The objectives for lessons are invariably based on what all of the class must learn, what most of them should learn, and what some could learn (must, should, could objectives). However, teachers do not use their knowledge of the capabilities of individuals to translate these into different tasks for different groups of pupils. As a result, all of the class attempt the same tasks in sequence regardless of whether this is appropriate for their individual needs.

Assessment of pupils' work is now thorough and reported to parents regularly. The introduction of the 'Achievement Tracker' stickers in pupils' exercise books makes them much better informed about their progress and improves their motivation to reach their targets. This assessment data is being used well to identify underachievement and provide support for pupils where it is needed. The revision sessions held after school and in holidays are

well attended and appreciated by pupils and their parents. Inconsistencies remain in the way pupils' work is marked. In the best cases, all errors are corrected and clear guidance is given specifying how pupils can improve their work with good reference to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Some marking is, however, still infrequent, cursory, and of little value.

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements but is currently too restricted in the choice of courses offered at Key Stage 4. The planned changes for September in the provision of at least one vocational course for all will better serve the needs of the less academic pupils. There is good provision in citizenship, personal, social and health education, and this helps to develop pupils' understanding of safe and healthy lifestyles. All pupils have access to a good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities to support their enjoyment and achievement.

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 – good.

#### Leadership and management

Staff, parents and pupils agree that the ethos of the school has massively improved. 'The role of the headteacher has been absolutely vital', said parents. They added that she was 'inspirational', had 'changed attitudes in the school' and 'given the school hope'. Teamwork within the staff has been strengthened through focused support from the headteacher and local authority. The senior team has been strengthened significantly with new appointments. As a result, improvements are evident in progress in English and in teaching in general. The school has robust and accurate procedures for monitoring and evaluating its own work. These have accurately identified staff in need of support, which has been provided, and an outcome is the improved teaching profile in the school. The school's monitoring has also identified that the quality of middle management varies too much. Whilst focused support here has brought about improvement in a number of areas, there is still some way to go in a few. The governing body is developing its role well. It has received training and is increasingly asking the school the right questions. However, its role in the monitoring of the school's work and the progress of the improvement plan is less well developed.

Progress on drafting a new school improvement plan is well advanced. The focus on monitoring teaching and pupils' progress means that rigorous monitoring of the previous plan's progress did not have the same priority. The production of the new plan has involved more staff than previously, as well as the chair of governors, and clear milestones have been set against

which its progress may be measured in future. The school's challenging targets for the quality of teaching at this point have been met.

Parents consider the 'Parents Forum' to be a highly effective way of seeking information about how well the school is improving and giving their views about what is or is not working well. They are particularly pleased with the much improved approachability of staff and say that they 'no longer feel fobbed off' because now 'the school listens'. Parents feel better informed about their children's work through organised parents' evenings and have more confident partnerships with staff through easier communication and more rapid response to concerns. The school works hard to seek the views of pupils and parents through regular surveys. Pupils feel that this is a good way of expressing their opinion but are disappointed that the school council is not as effective a forum as it used to be for contributing their ideas for school improvement.

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 – good
- establish and implement a school plan to improve achievement and standards, rigorously monitoring its progress to keep development on schedule – satisfactory
- work more closely with stakeholders and the local community to build more confident and profitable partnerships – good.

#### External support

The local authority continues to provide the school with good, focused support which is successfully helping the school to improve. The level of support is now being reduced appropriately as the school becomes more successful in generating its own improvement.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve provision, teaching and progress in science to match that in the other core subjects.

- Make better use of the 'must, should, could' lesson objectives to match tasks more closely to the needs of individuals in lessons.

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