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Mr Adrian Larkin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Larkin

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CLOUGHWOOD SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on the 15 and 16 May 2007, 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 December 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

I observed the school's work in secondary classes and assemblies, and met with the headteacher and senior staff, teachers and support staff, and representatives of the governing body and of the local authority (LA).

Context

A new headteacher took up post in January 2007. The nurture group for Year 11 students no longer operates and the students involved are fully integrated with the other Year 11 students. During the monitoring visit the majority of the Year 11 students were on work placements and Year 6 pupils were taking the national end-of-Key Stage 2 tests.

Achievement and standards

Students made satisfactory progress, overall, in the five lessons observed in the secondary department. This represents a significant improvement in progress from the inspection of December 2006. Because of the nature of the students' behavioural difficulties, much depended on the attitude of individuals within the class as to whether they made good use of the opportunities they were given. In each class, some students demonstrated good levels of knowledge and understanding, although the intelligence and capability their comments revealed did not always result in outcomes of an appropriate quality and standard.

The results of the 2007 national tests and examinations will be available for the second monitoring visit. Although new systems to track the progress of students are in the process of development, early indications are that the improving provision within the school is leading to higher standards and better achievement. Therefore the school expects improved performance at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations.

Year 11 students are successfully moving into further education, employment and training on leaving the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006.

- Improve achievement and standards in English, mathematics and religious education for students throughout the secondary department by ensuring good quality of teaching and learning in these subjects – good progress.

Personal development and well-being

There has been a significant improvement in most aspects of students' personal development and well-being. Attendance has improved by five percentage points to 84% and there have been no exclusions since the new headteacher took up post. In lessons the majority of students enjoy their work and have good relationships with the teachers and support staff. Standards of behaviour and attitudes to work are frequently unsatisfactory in relation to those seen in most schools, due to the nature of students' behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. However, students are making good progress in improving their behaviour and attitudes. They want to do well. The cycle of deteriorating behaviour and increased unhappiness reported in the December 2006 inspection has been reversed. All the Every Child Matters outcomes are positive. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is significantly improved. Students are increasingly taking responsibility for their actions and evaluate their behaviour openly and with honesty. Furthermore, when individual students behave unacceptably, the school's systems for managing behaviour are swiftly brought into play, so

that the student has the necessary support and that the learning of others is not adversely affected. Better organised work experience and the improved prospects for Year 11 students are helping to raise students' expectations of what they can look forward to on leaving the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006.

- Analyse the patterns of poor attendance and take decisive action to improve it – good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was satisfactory overall. Teachers coped successfully in promoting learning and managing students' often challenging behaviour and attitudes. Some good and outstanding teaching was observed, indicating that models of good practice are present within the school. Teaching makes good use of resources, including interactive whiteboards. There are high expectations of students and all lessons have a clear structure. Teachers are honest with students in evaluating behaviour and they find every opportunity to praise students when they achieve well. Teaching assistants are now deployed to support the teaching in individual subjects, rather than in supporting individual students in dealing with their problems. This is a positive development, shifting the emphasis to learning and reducing the dependency of students on others.

Despite the improvements in teaching, much remains to be done to make learning consistently good. The circumstances that have prevailed at the school for several years have meant that little professional development has taken place. A discussion about what constitutes effective teaching and learning is long overdue and, although teaching assistants are playing a more direct role in teaching and learning, their contribution could be greater still. Within the lessons observed, the most common shortfall was in the match of learning objectives to the individual learning needs of the students, which was not as close as it should be.

The curriculum is significantly improved. Swift action was taken to re-introduce lessons in religious education and in citizenship. These are already making a positive contribution to students' enjoyment and achievement. The development of Students' Services, designed to help students deal with their emotional problems, accessing a range of agencies across children's services, is filling a long-standing gap in the school's provision. The curriculum for 14 to 16 year-olds is being developed successfully at a rapid pace to provide pathways into further education, employment and training for the students preparing to leave school. The school has excellent productive links with the Connexions service, although contact with voluntary agencies is underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support for students were judged satisfactory in the December 2006 inspection and they remain stronger features of the work of the school. All staff work hard in the best interests of students and want them to do well. Partnerships with agencies outside of the school, particularly with the LA, are becoming more effective and parents are happier about the school than they have been in the recent past. Systems to track students' academic progress are being developed and teachers are increasingly aware of the need to know the levels at which students are working, and therefore, what they need to do next.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006.

- Develop and implement a whole-school system for tracking students' progress and monitor its use to raise students' achievement – satisfactory progress.
- Ensure that opportunities are provided through the curriculum to promote pupils' spiritual development, raise their awareness of cultural diversity and promote their emotional well-being – good progress.
- Ensure that statutory requirements are met in the provision for citizenship and religious education – good progress.
- Develop and implement a robust and coherent vocational curriculum linked to relevant opportunities for students' work to be accredited – good progress.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management are the most improved aspects of the school. The new headteacher has introduced a clear vision for the school, tackled each of the areas for improvement energetically and has empowered the senior staff. The school has a good ethos: it is welcoming, calm, purposeful and committed to the best outcomes for students. The capacity to sustain improvement is being built. Teachers are taking on new responsibilities and developing their leadership roles. The quality of teaching and learning is checked rigorously and honestly. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. In the business of winning hearts and minds, the new leadership has made considerable progress. However, such is the legacy of disillusionment and underperformance, more work is yet to be done.

The governing body, working closely with the new headteacher and the LA, is undertaking training to increase its effectiveness and is beginning to take ownership of its full role and responsibilities.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2006.

- Conduct an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and involve all of the senior team and governors in whole-school planning to raise achievement – good progress.

- Improve communication and ensure that systems are established to share good practice throughout the school – good progress.

External support

The LA provides a comprehensive range of support for the school, within each of the eight areas for improvement. It is providing good support to the headteacher, staff and the governing body and is a significant partner in the school's improvement. The LA's statement of action is proving an effective evaluation tool to assess the progress the school is making.

The school is increasingly drawing in support from external partners, although the voluntary sector is not represented. The Connexions service provides excellent support for students in Year 11.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the professional development opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants, particularly in relation to what constitutes good teaching and learning and how to make the most out of support for teaching and learning.
- Involve students more in evaluating their learning and taking responsibility for their actions.
- Eradicate the remaining legacy of disillusionment within the staff.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
H M Inspector