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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 to your school on 10 July 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 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

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the head of the science department, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there has been some turnover of teachers. Others, including some senior leaders, will be leaving the school at the end of this term. The science department was a particular focus for this visit. It has suffered from staff turnover and illness but, with new appointments, it should be fully staffed from September.

Achievement and standards

This year's unvalidated results for the end of Year 9 National Curriculum tests for mathematics and science show that standards in these subjects are broadly similar to those in 2006. They remain about average in mathematics and above average in

science. However, when pupils' starting points are also considered, this still represents underachievement, especially in science. Under the leadership of the new head of department, pupils currently in Year 9 have made better progress in science this year than they did in the past. However, this has not been sufficient to overcome the legacy of underachievement. Nevertheless, more pupils in Year 9 are enjoying science, as shown by the uptake of the challenging option to study all three sciences to GCSE in Year 10.

The school's internal systems continue to show at least satisfactory progress for pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 towards increasingly challenging targets, although there are some fluctuations in progress. Based on the small sample of lessons observed, standards are broadly as expected given the pupils' starting points. At the time of this visit, pupils in Year 11 had effectively left the school following their examinations. Pupils in Year 10 were undertaking work experience. Consequently, the work of these pupils was not observed during lessons. The school's internal tracking of pupils' progress in Year 11 shows that standards are likely to be better than in 2006. However, the school's targets are unlikely to be met and standards remain too low at the end of Year 11.

Personal development and well-being

In the lessons observed, pupils mainly demonstrated positive attitudes and enjoyed working collaboratively. Staff training on more active teaching methods has paid off and pupils are participating more in lessons. This increased involvement of pupils in lessons is improving the pace of their learning. Even so, this improvement in attitude is not yet fully secure and there are still some pupils who find good behaviour difficult. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to reflect on their learning in lessons and to make choices about the work they should complete and any further support they might need.

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 – this area was not a focus on this occasion and no judgment on progress can be made.

Quality of provision

At the last monitoring inspection it was clear that staff training about the use of assessment was beginning to pay dividends. Teachers made sure that pupils knew what it was they were expected to learn and objectives for learning at different levels were beginning to be used. However, these objectives were not being used efficiently enough to make sure that all pupils were given work at just the right level for them throughout the lesson.

School documents show that further training has taken place and records of internal observations show checking of this area by senior and middle leaders as well as

external consultants. A variety of ways of ensuring that pupils are challenged at just the right level are now in evidence. In one lesson, for example, all pupils had the same basic task, but the middle attaining group had key words to support their answer. The lower attaining pupils also had an outline to help them organise their work. In another more active lesson, pupils worked in groups. The objective for the most capable included taking a leadership role and the mixed ability groupings allowed this to happen in a natural way. In a third lesson, pupils indicated how they felt about different aspects of the lesson using red and green cards. This strategy gave the teacher useful information about how well different parts of the lesson were understood. It also enabled pupils to make an informed choice as to whether they needed a prepared 'help sheet' or further discussion with the teacher before completing the task. These different methods of matching tasks to individuals work well and indicate the willingness of staff to take on board new ideas and use them effectively. However, pupils' differing learning needs are still not consistently met in all lessons. In one lesson, for example, challenging activities were well planned for a small number of the most capable pupils, but the variation in task for others was less effectively planned. Nevertheless, assessment is being used in teaching more extensively, with a real focus on accelerating learning, and this is having an impact on the progress made, especially by the younger pupils.

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

The school's leadership and management continue to strengthen. The remodelled senior leadership team is now a leaner and more effective group, with clear areas of responsibility. Staff continue to be inspired to improve, as is shown in the willingness to further adjust the use of assessment and planning to make teaching more challenging and learning more active. Middle managers have a secure grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of their areas. Action plans are well thought out and often include clear timescales and milestones by which their effectiveness can be measured. Recent key appointments to lead the English and science departments have quickly taken effect and ensured that the departments operate as teams. They have ensured that the appropriate structures, policies and procedures are in place to support colleagues. Whole school improvement planning now involves wider consultation and appropriately focuses on the most pertinent priorities, recognising the school's successes as well as those areas that still require work. This prioritisation is based on a secure knowledge of the school gleaned from regular monitoring of its work through lesson observations and checks of planning and pupils' completed work. The school sensibly combines internal monitoring and the use of external consultants to ensure that rigour is maintained. No punches are pulled in feedback to staff on their effectiveness, but equally support is offered where necessary. The

quality of these activities and the actions that stem from them have been instrumental in maintaining the pace of 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 – good
- work more closely with stakeholders and the local community to build more confident and profitable partnerships – this area was not a focus for this visit and no judgement is possible on this occasion.

External support

The local authority is reorganising its support for school and there has been a change of link adviser to the school. The level of challenge and support provided continues to be appropriate and is reducing as the school becomes more able to direct its own improvement. The school is making good use of external support from a variety of sources to supplement its own growing expertise.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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