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24 September 2007

Ms Gill Broom
Headteacher
Hameldon Community College
Byron Street
Burnley
Lancashire
BB12 6NU

Dear Ms Broom

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HAMELDON
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Following my visit with Andrew Bennett, Chris Penter, Andy Henderson and Gill Salter-Smith, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 19 and 20 September 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 February 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education and Inclusion for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. McCloy".

Marguerite McCloy HMI
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF HAMELDON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 19 and 20 September 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of staff, groups of students, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection in February 2007, the college has made a number of staff appointments to strengthen the leadership team. Increasing staffing stability and a reduction in absences has reduced the need for short-term supply teachers.

Achievement and standards

Standards in both key stages are below average. Achievement is inadequate. Students do not make sufficiently rapid and consistent progress in order to do as well as they should and thus improve the standard of their work. Results achieved by Year 9 students in the summer 2007 national tests in English, mathematics and science fell short of targets set by the college. They were below what might have been expected, given the students' prior attainment; results in English were particularly disappointing. Students at the end of Key Stage 4 achieved GCSE grades that were broadly in line with those expected by staff in the two former schools, but these results were below the new college's targets and show that students made insufficient progress. Boys generally, and Asian boys in particular, performed notably less well than girls. Although early in the college year, students' work seen during this inspection indicates that standards remain below average in many subjects. A significant number of students lack enthusiasm for their work, or have not developed good independent learning habits; this is holding back the acceleration in progress necessary to raise standards.

Senior leaders recognise this situation. They are making strenuous efforts to implement systems and processes to raise standards and improve the progress made by students. Settled staffing, consistent approaches to lesson planning, and more interesting approaches to work in the best lessons, are beginning to engage students' interests and enhance their confidence as learners. The effectiveness of target setting throughout the college is now supported by an assessment calendar and training for teachers. This is intended to help the teachers recognise standards and evaluate progress more accurately and offer more clearly focused advice to students on how to improve the quality of their work. Following senior leaders' initial analysis of 2007 test and examination results, middle leaders have been required to review their areas in detail, including a consideration of specific groups of students at risk of underachieving, in order to ensure that appropriate challenge and support are presented in readiness for the 2008 tests and examinations. Meticulous monitoring by senior leaders, initially of core subjects, has been scheduled to provide a detailed

picture of the specific strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning that impact day-to-day on standards and achievement.

This strategy is appropriate but implementation is at an early stage and, understandably, has yet to effect an improvement in the standards of the students' work and their levels of achievement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- raise levels of achievement – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is improving as the new behaviour policy begins to take effect. Its impact is already evident this term in the sharp reduction in the number of students who need to be removed from lessons for misbehaviour, and in the positive relationships and racial harmony generally seen. This improvement is valued by staff and students, who say that the college is calmer and more settled than in the past. Students themselves comment on the more positive climate for learning – "there is a better mood in the college, and we get on better with each other now". They appreciate the emphasis on rewards which provide an extra incentive to do the best they can. Students feel that sanctions are effective, so that everyone is clear about the consequences of unsatisfactory behaviour or attendance, and this motivates most of them to try harder.

Arrangements for pastoral care are beginning to improve students' attitudes to their work and their college. Students' progress is now tracked; early warning systems which identify and support those causing concern are developing effectively. A number spoke enthusiastically about their 'Red/Amber/Green' ratings, which are shared with parents and indicate how well they are progressing towards their academic and personal targets. Despite this, the behaviour and poor attitudes to learning of a minority of students continue to provide a challenge for the college.

The college is working strenuously to improve attendance. Most students understand that attendance is important to their progress. High priority is given to identifying and tackling the causes of poor attendance. Good attendance is recognised and rewarded, and most students are responding well to this. Early indications this term suggest a satisfactory improvement compared with last year's significantly below average performance. Although a majority of students arrive at college on time, the numbers arriving late are still too high. Despite being met at the gate each morning as they arrive, and the college's firm view on punctuality - with sanctions, support and parental contact where appropriate - a substantial number show a distinct lack of urgency about arriving on time. Punctuality to lessons is generally satisfactory and improving because late arrivals are now being challenged effectively. However, poor attendance and punctuality continue to hold back the achievement of some students throughout the college.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning – satisfactory

Quality of provision

Compared with the inspection in February 2007, the proportion of inadequate lessons has reduced and the number of good lessons has increased. A more stable staff and the reduction in the number of split classes have contributed to improvements, although there are not yet enough good lessons to ensure that students achieve well enough to eradicate a legacy of underachievement.

The college has approached the task of improving learning and teaching robustly, focusing on remedying specific areas of weakness identified through external and internal reviews. Well-targeted professional development for all staff, supported by the LA's consultants, is leading to improvements. Staff are growing in confidence to share best practice and learn from each other. Additional support for some teachers and rigorous monitoring of lessons across the college by senior leaders and the LA are helping staff to develop and improve their skills.

An enthusiastic volunteer working group led by a senior leader has recently produced a policy for learning and teaching, planning frameworks and guidelines. These are accepted by staff and are helping to bring greater consistency in some elements of lessons, which are now well structured. Introductory activities are mostly successful in engaging students' interest, and students are made aware of what they will learn during the lesson. Recently introduced guidelines for managing behaviour are helping teachers to set clear expectations of conduct and result in most lessons being orderly.

In lessons where students make good progress, teachers set high expectations and involve students in a variety of challenging tasks that proceed at a good pace. Teachers question students well to ensure that they think for themselves. Resources, including electronic whiteboards, are used effectively to engage and enthuse students. An ethos of hard work, positive attitudes and good behaviour is sustained by well-deserved praise and support, alongside a strong element of challenge. Students know what they are expected to learn and are involved in reviewing their own work against clear criteria.

There remain features of teaching which are not yet consistently effective. Some lessons are dull and include too much listening to the teacher or copying work into exercise books. The final part of lessons is not always used well to help students identify what they have learned and what they need to do next. Students are not fully aware of their target levels or grades, and information on their prior attainment is not being used to ensure that work matches students' different levels of ability. Not enough is being done to help students improve their literacy skills in lessons across the curriculum.

The role of teaching assistants is not sufficiently clear or well managed by teachers, so that they do not contribute effectively to students' learning. Teachers are aware of which students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities but they are not using their personal learning plans sufficiently to guide learning in their subject.

In unsatisfactory lessons, despite the teachers' best efforts, the poor attitudes of a small proportion of students disrupt learning for the whole class and inadequate progress is made. On some occasions not enough demand is made of students because the work is repetitive or too easy.

In this early part of the term, students have a clear plan for homework and it is set regularly. Students are handing it in and it is being marked. Most work is marked according to the college's policy, giving a clear indication as to whether it is meeting the pupil's target. Guidance on what to improve is not always helpful enough, and the marking policy is about to be reviewed.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- improve the quality of teaching so more of it is good or better – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The start of this new academic year has been characterised by a renewed energy and optimism for the future of the college and increased confidence within the senior team. The headteacher has provided strong leadership and a clear sense of purpose through a difficult period of transition and change. She is well supported by her leadership team and together they articulate a clear vision for the continued improvement of the college which is shared by staff and governors. A culture is emerging in which students are valued, challenged and have their achievements recognised.

Since the February 2007 inspection, there has been a determined effort to put in place the systems and structures which provide a framework for effective learning. Whilst these structures now exist, they are not yet consistently applied across the college, nor have they been operational long enough to have had a significant impact on learning and teaching. Some variation exists in the quality and impact of senior leaders. The college, with the help of the LA, is carrying out a skills audit and developing a training programme to improve the consistency of senior leadership. Training to develop the skills of middle leaders is planned, and the college is creating strong and supportive links between senior and middle leaders in order to contribute to this.

Improvement planning is appropriately focused on the governors' post-inspection action plan and, with the assistance of the LA, the college has set realistic targets for improvement within an appropriate timescale. Self-evaluation is honest and fully recognises aspects which are not yet good enough. However, it is insufficiently developed to provide clear and accurate evidence of the impact of the college's actions on the areas for improvement.

At the time of the last inspection, the governing body had only recently been formed. There is a coherent and relevant committee structure, with an overall steering group monitoring the college's progress. Governors are holding the college to account by asking questions, challenging decisions and suggesting changes as appropriate.

The leadership team and staff acknowledge the need to make more rapid progress in raising standards of attainment across the college. As a result, the focus on developing a significantly larger proportion of good quality learning and teaching is of the highest priority.

Attitudes to learning remain unsatisfactory for a significant minority of students and therefore a priority for the leadership team has been to raise their expectations and place a renewed emphasis on students taking some responsibility for their own learning. This, together with the positive reinforcement provided by the new rewards system, is beginning to have an impact.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- improve the consistency of leadership and management – satisfactory

External support

The LA had been providing additional support and advice to the college from the time of its opening in September 2006, following the amalgamation of two separate secondary schools on the same site. The LA's statement of action covers the college's priorities for improvement in a coherent and comprehensive manner. The college has an allocated adviser from the LA's monitoring and intervention team, a school improvement partner and an additional adviser who are working effectively together to support and challenge the college to bring about the necessary improvements. This support involves significant input by subject consultants and other advisers. Governors have been strongly guided and supported in writing the college's post-inspection action plan. The LA's plans clearly identify responsibilities, timescales and success criteria. Good arrangements are made regularly to monitor the impact of the intensive support provided. The level of additional resources and support is currently very high, but appropriate in the circumstances, as the impact of the LA's work has strengthened the college's capacity for improvement. This level of support will reduce as the college's capacity to improve grows.

The LA's target date of February 2009 for the college's removal from special measures is appropriate.

Priorities for further improvement

The college should continue its work on the four priorities identified in the February 2007 inspection.