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29 February 2008

Ms Gill Broom
Headteacher
Hameldon Community College
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Lancashire
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Dear Ms Broom

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HAMELDON
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Following my visit with Brian Dower, Peter McKay, Tony Pearson and Joe Clark, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 27 and 28 February 2008, 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 February 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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

Marguerite McCloy HMI
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF HAMELDON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 27 and 28 February 2008

Evidence

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

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in September 2007, the number of students on roll has fallen slightly. The college has experienced difficulties in filling some vacant teaching posts, particularly in mathematics, and a number of staff absences necessitated the deployment of several temporary teachers. After a positive start to the academic year, the college suffered a setback to plans to improve its image in the community following an incident in December 2007 which received negative media coverage. Plans for the siting of Hameldon Community College's new building have recently been published, with a completion target date of September 2010. This will accommodate a reduced student population of 750 and be constructed on a site which is approximately two miles from the existing college buildings.

Achievement and standards

Standards attained by students in Years 9 and 11 in the summer 2007 national tests and examinations were lower than average and reflect inadequate progress made in the past in the former schools, particularly at Key Stage 3. Too many students were unable to make up lost ground and failed to meet the challenging targets set by the college. The college's performance in its specialist subjects was disappointing, with well below average results in business studies and information technology and below average attainment in science.

The college's challenging targets for attainment in mathematics, English and science at both key stages 3 and 4 in 2008 are in line with national averages. Recent reviews by the leadership team indicate that although many students are well placed to meet their GCSE targets in English, targets in mathematics are unlikely to be achieved. As a result of this evaluation of progress, the college has put into place a well targeted range of intervention strategies and additional support for those students who are currently achieving below expected levels or grades. It is too early to predict the likely impact of those strategies, but there is a clear determination to use them effectively to improve students' performance. In addition, Year 10 students' performances in recent modular tests in mathematics bode well for the college's results next year.

Standards seen in students' work during this inspection remain below average overall. Whilst progress in lessons is satisfactory and sometimes good, there remains much to be done to accelerate achievement to the level required to raise standards.

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

- raise levels of achievement – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

There have been some improvements in aspects of students' personal development since the previous inspection. The number of exclusions has fallen. Attendance has improved a little due to more effective systems for monitoring absences, the greater involvement of form tutors and a new rewards system for good attendance.

Governors are involved in attendance panel meetings. Support from the education welfare service has been reorganised to be more effective. Systems for recording attendance, whilst generally secure, need to be more robust in Key Stage 4. Levels of attendance overall remain well below average, particularly in Year 11, and particularly girls' attendance.

Punctuality to college and to lessons remains a concern. Whilst there has been some improvement due to tighter procedures and better recording, too many students saunter into college after the bell has gone for the start of the day. Lateness to lessons is not always vigorously challenged and sanctions for lateness are not consistently applied by all teachers.

The new behaviour policy introduced in September is used effectively in lessons by some teachers but its application is inconsistent. Students are not always clear what is expected of them and what sanctions will be applied if they transgress. There remains low level disruption in some classes. Behaviour around the school is generally orderly, for example, in the dining rooms and the play areas. Incidents of serious misbehaviour still occur but are declining. The isolation room is not proving effective in moderating the behaviour of students who are sent there. The learning support centre provides good personal support for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and in helping students re-integrate back into school after lengthy absence. It is not yet sufficiently involved in supporting students through targeted programmes to help them change their behaviour to a more acceptable standard when they return to their normal lessons.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is improving. Students now have personal learning plans with suitable targets for improvement. A good feature is students' involvement in drawing up their targets. However, their personal and academic progress in meeting their targets as they move through the school is not being effectively tracked.

A significant minority of students still arrive at the college unprepared, without the necessary equipment or inclination for learning. Students who spoke to the inspectors said that this is beginning to change, but the pace of change, and the development of a whole-school learning ethos, is too slow. The college recognises that this needs to be tackled with much greater urgency if students are not to continue underachieving.

Strengths in the provision for students' welfare recognised in the original inspection are still evident and the provision has continued to improve. Students with particular problems have access to more appropriate professional expertise because the college now has productive links with a broader range of outside agencies. The effectiveness of the work of the inclusion team, personal development managers and well-being coordinators has contributed to the reduction in exclusions. They are also particularly effective in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable students, for example looked after children or students reintegrated into the college after returning from a period of exclusion. Students themselves say that they find the well-being coordinators particularly adept in responding to anxieties which they have about bullying or harassment.

Students now feel that their views are taken into account. The school council is rightly proud of the contribution it is making in helping bring about change, for example through the provision of benches in the yards. Students of all abilities and backgrounds are generally friendly and communicative. The resentment many felt when their two schools were amalgamated has been rationalised. As one student put it 'I didn't want it to happen but I've made new friends and now I don't think about it anymore'.

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

- improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning – satisfactory

Quality of provision

Well-conceived and targeted strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning are in place and are beginning to take effect. Compared with the monitoring inspection in September 2007 the amount of good or better teaching remains similar at about two-fifths, but the proportion of inadequate teaching has reduced further. This is in spite of continuing difficulties with staff absence and the recruitment of specialist teachers. Improvement in the quality of teaching can be attributed largely to the intensive personal support provided for a number of less effective teachers whose performance is now securely satisfactory or better. The college acknowledges the need now to refocus on improving the skills of those teachers who have the capacity to take a step further. To this end, a group of about fifteen staff have begun a training programme intended to raise their performance from satisfactory to good or from good to outstanding. Other groups are receiving additional coaching in specific aspects of teaching. These developments are based on the outcomes of intensive monitoring of teaching and learning by LA advisers, senior leaders and curriculum leaders, which give a clear and accurate picture of where improvements are needed. They are also underpinned by the work of a staff working group, under the leadership of a deputy headteacher and supported by the recently appointed teaching and learning coach. This volunteer group has produced a revised policy for teaching and learning, which sets clear guidelines and expectations for classroom practice to be followed by all staff.

As a result of training and support, most lessons are planned and conducted following a common format, with a structured sequence of tasks and activities.

Statements of learning objectives and expected outcomes are usually clear and shared so students know how learning will build on what has been done before and prepare them for the next step. Teachers' explanations are often enhanced by good subject knowledge and use of the interactive whiteboard to provide a visual focus. Starter activities are used to engage students and give a sense of direction for the lesson. A review of what has been learned is used routinely at the end of lessons.

In the most effective lessons students make good progress because teachers set high expectations for work and behaviour, tasks are challenging and the lesson proceeds at a good pace. Questioning is used effectively to stimulate discussion and to check learning, especially where it is carefully targeted. Planning ensures a good balance between whole class, group and individual activities. There are good opportunities for students to learn independently and undertake further enquiry and research beyond the classroom. Learning outcomes are linked to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades so students know the standard they are aiming for and have the chance to evaluate their own performance. Positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour generate an atmosphere conducive to learning and progress.

Some of the deficiencies in teaching and learning reported previously persist, due in some cases to teachers' reluctance to use the agreed protocols for planning and managing lessons. In less effective lessons students are expected to learn primarily by listening to the teacher. Those who have learning difficulties feel that they do not always receive the additional help they need and teachers' planning often takes no account of their needs. Tasks and activities can be dull and are often based on undemanding worksheets. Students' knowledge of how well they are making progress towards their targets remains patchy. In such lessons behaviour can often deteriorate because students are not engaged by the teaching or curriculum and strategies for managing behaviour are not used consistently or effectively. Consequently, teachers become less likely to take risks in order to plan exciting lessons which motivate and engage students.

Some aspects of teaching and learning are underdeveloped across the school. Teachers' use of prior attainment data to plan work well matched to different needs and capabilities is at a very early stage, so students are not always presented with adequate challenge. Marking is inconsistent and does not clearly explain the standard achieved, what has been done well and what needs to improve. The impact of a revised policy to be introduced shortly will depend on a more consistent implementation and application than has been the case hitherto.

Academic guidance and support is improving as teachers get more used to using systems devised and implemented to record and track students' academic progress and in particular, identify and tackle underachievement at an early stage. However, the college knows that it still needs to do more to improve the effectiveness of these procedures by ensuring that they are used with greater consistency.

The college is committed to making a stronger contribution to community cohesion. It has been successful in securing funding for a 'Good Relations' project, to act upon recommendations made by external consultants who conducted research in the

college and its local community. Progress towards strengthening cohesion has to date been more effective within the college, for example through the involvement of students from different backgrounds in sports' leadership training. The college also expects staff to place a greater focus on relevant aspects of students' personal development when planning lessons across all subjects. Planning to contribute to cohesion within the broader community is at a relatively early stage although already demonstrating some modest success by attracting an improved attendance of Asian heritage parents to community meetings.

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 leadership team and governors know that the standing of the college in the community and its future success are dependent on higher academic standards. Members of staff share this view but there remain inconsistencies in applying agreed systems and structures to speed the pace of students' learning. This point was made during the first monitoring inspection in September and achieving conformity remains a challenge for the senior team. For example, variations were seen in the quality and regularity of marking. Once the new marking policy has been agreed it has to be routinely adopted by all staff if it is to impact on raising standards.

There have been improvements in the management and administration needed for tracking students' progress, enabling more effective support to be given when weaknesses are uncovered. This system is being used consistently. It means that senior leaders have a better understanding of progress against the college's performance targets.

Training for middle leaders, planned last term, was delayed but has begun recently. Ongoing support, challenge and professional development for the senior team continues on an individual basis according to need. The LA and college leaders recognise that the middle leader training programmes need to be completed as a matter of urgency. There remains significant variation in the skills and quality of middle leadership.

The chair of governors has a realistic appraisal of where the college is in its development and what needs to happen to move it forward. He is committed to its success and is its strong advocate in the community and in negotiations with the LA. The headteacher remains steadfast in her determination to raise achievement and to promote a positive image of the college in the community. She has the support of her leadership team in working to instil a sense of identity and pride throughout the college.

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 continues to provide the regular support of subject consultants and school improvement advisers and rigorously monitors the college's progress. In its reviews of the quality of teaching and leadership, the LA has identified where improvements are being made and where weaknesses remain. Future support will appropriately focus on building the confidence and capacity of middle leaders to take a more active involvement in evaluating and improving provision in subjects and aspects of the college's work. In addition, the LA intends to utilise the expertise of consultants in supporting the school's efforts to further improve students' personal development and behaviour.

Priorities for further improvement

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