

1 May 2008

Mr Tarun Kapur  
The Acting Headteacher  
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Wilmslow Road  
East Didsbury  
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Dear Mr Kapur

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF PARRS WOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Following my visit with Frank Norris HMI, Paul Chambers HMI, Jim Kidd, Marie Corday and Ronald Bulman, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29 and 30 April 2008, 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 November 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 teacher may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy  
H M Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF PARRS WOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 29 and 30 April 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, nominated staff, groups of students, the chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Parent Champion and representatives from the local authority (LA). Thirty-six lessons were observed on the first day of the inspection. The school was closed to students on the second day of the inspection due to a staff training day.

### Context

Since the school was placed into special measures, the headteacher has left the school and an acting headteacher has been appointed. An interim executive board (IEB) has replaced the governing body.

### Achievement and standards

The school has placed the improvement of standards and achievement at the forefront of its work. Students have been made aware of their academic targets across the curriculum. Procedures for monitoring the achievement of students are more closely focused on the progress made by individual learners as well as specific groups of learners. Booster and revision sessions are a key part of subject departments' work and classes for students who have fallen behind in their learning are well attended. The recently appointed directors of learning are increasingly identifying where intervention strategies are required and are beginning to liaise more regularly with heads of subject departments. Although these systems are not fully embedded, their effect is positive and data provided by the school indicate that students' attainment in both English and mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4, is beginning to rise. For example, significant numbers of students in Year 9 have already gained a nationally recognised qualification in preparatory modules in mathematics, prior to their early entry to the GCSE examination in Year 10. Similarly, results in the November GCSE examinations in English were much higher than those in the June examinations and the difference in standards between boys and girls narrowed. The school has also recognised the importance of setting more challenging targets in Years 10 and 11, and students state that they are more motivated to reach higher standards as a result.

Following careful consideration, the school has modified its approach to entering students early for national tests in Key Stage 3. Fewer students now sit their papers early. Closer monitoring of how well students are achieving in the core subjects has led to more accurate assessments of both their current performance and of what they can achieve. As a result, the school considers that the proportion of students in Years 8 and 9 who will meet their targets is now much higher than in previous years. Strategies to foster higher standards amongst boys are beginning to take effect. In addition, significant numbers of students who speak English as an additional

language are on course to reach higher National Curriculum levels in English. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress at the same rate as their peers because of effective small group tuition led by additional adults. However, the school recognises that more able students do not always reach the standards of which they are capable. The school also understands that students need to be made more aware of what they need to do to improve their work, if achievement and standards are to rise further.

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

- Raise standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 3 and in English and mathematics – satisfactory

### Personal development and well-being

In the inspection of November 2007, some low-level disruption in classes was identified. A more consistent approach to the management of behaviour has been adopted, including a greater emphasis on promoting good conduct and a greater staff presence around the school building. This has led to some improvements. The number of fixed-term exclusions has declined and students confirmed that behaviour, in lessons and around school, is better. Nonetheless, there still remains a degree of inappropriate low-level behaviour in some classes. Behaviour around school shows a similar pattern. For example, the orderly departure of the majority of students via the relatively narrow school exits at the end of the school day, contrasts with the occasional over-boisterous behaviour of a few. Data provided by the school indicate that attendance remains below average. A sizeable number of students do not arrive on time for school or lessons and measures taken to improve punctuality have not always been effective. Students are proud of the school and appreciate the support that they receive. Their views are represented effectively by the student leadership team which meets regularly with senior staff to discuss whole-school issues.

### Quality of provision

The school has made satisfactory progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning. There is a small amount of excellent teaching and well over a third of lessons observed were good, but the majority remains satisfactory and some inadequate teaching persists. Nevertheless, the rise in attainment and the positive perceptions of students show that teaching and learning are improving. Improvements stem from a carefully considered learning and teaching policy supported by the LA and based on audits and reviews conducted with staff, students and parents. Training has taken place on planning and behaviour management. Excellent teaching practice is disseminated by the best practitioners and by coaching from managers and advanced skills teachers. A vigorous programme of lesson observations and checks on students' work is beginning to improve standards and the effectiveness of work in classrooms. These innovations have been energetically pursued at all levels of staff but have yet to take full effect.

Many teachers have good subject knowledge, manage classes well and enjoy positive relations with students, which promote progress. Staff are becoming more adept in setting and encouraging work towards subject and individual targets based on assessment data. Non-specialist teachers, however, have varied success in some subjects. Some teachers still talk too much, which restricts students' contributions and the amount of support that additional adults can provide. Consequently, achievement in these lessons is satisfactory. The quality of planning is variable. Some plans merely describe what happens next, with little emphasis on intended outcomes, and many lessons are based on brief notes in planners. Presentations are usually clear, with useful contributions from students. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used beneficially, although teachers' expertise in the use of interactive whiteboards varies. In some lessons, dull tasks and lengthy presentations by teachers contribute to restlessness and inattentive behaviour. The most successful lessons are carefully planned with firm objectives that are matched to students' abilities, which teachers discuss and summarise with their classes. Well supported individual or paired work enables students to take responsibility for their own learning. In these lessons, teachers understand the need to challenge the most able and help them work towards the high standards they are capable of. Students respond positively to stimulating teaching, since teachers are setting more tasks requiring collaborative effort. They welcome being able to make useful contributions, seek assistance where needed and appreciate praise and rewards such as the 'Gold Slip' system.

The amount and relevance of homework varies. It ranges from challenging projects requiring research, group effort and ICT skills to tasks with little more than token value. Many teachers give adequate verbal and written feedback to students. However, the quality of marking varies considerably, ranging from brief and infrequent comments to constructive dialogue between teachers and students.

The curriculum addresses the needs of most students. The school has improved choice and diversity in the range of pathways available for students in Key Stage 4. Curriculum planning to match the needs of individual students is more balanced and appropriate in Key Stage 4 but is inconsistent in Key Stage 3. The progress of some higher attaining students, particularly in Key Stage 3, is not as strong as that of other groups. The school is working on measures to improve this through the planning of more challenging work and pupil tasks but these have yet to have an impact. The school has an appropriate focus on the need to design a curriculum that recognises the prior knowledge, understanding and skills of its new students in Year 7. To this end, there are useful plans to gather and use more information from local primary schools to provide a curriculum that does not repeat previous learning and that correctly identifies students' needs. The development of important skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT in many subjects is at an early stage of improvement. In physical education, there has been a thorough and exhaustive overhaul of the GCSE curriculum to raise standards in the written element of the subject. Despite some recent improvements, the collaboration between technology, one of the school's specialisms, and other subjects is piecemeal and has had limited impact.

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

- Ensure that teaching and learning are good across the whole school – satisfactory
- Provide a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all students, particularly at Key Stage 3 – inadequate

### Leadership and management

Since taking up post, the acting headteacher has provided dynamic leadership for the school. His firm and clear direction has raised morale amongst staff and focused them on the urgent need to raise standards. Consequently, the school is beginning to develop a culture of high expectations in terms of what students can achieve. This is reflected in the decision to raise the school's academic targets at Key Stages 3 and 4. A temporary management structure has been established and the size of the senior management team has been reduced in order to make it more effective. Although new job descriptions have not yet been written, extensive reviews of the work of senior staff have taken place with the result that key managers and other staff are clearer about their roles and, consequently, much more accountable. This development of senior leadership is beginning to increase the school's capacity to improve.

The accountability of staff has been developed at all levels in the school. Steps have been taken to check that staff workloads are equitably distributed. Return-to-work interviews have been instituted and staff absence has decreased. Plans have been laid to implement fully a system for the statutory performance management of teachers. Effective measures have been taken to introduce a system that monitors teaching, learning and students' work. Senior and middle managers have been trained in monitoring techniques and in how to provide constructive feedback to teachers to help them improve. Since the beginning of the year, all teachers have been observed teaching. As a result, the school has a clearer picture of the quality of teaching and of the effectiveness of subject departments. However, the school's overall assessment of the quality of teaching and learning is more generous than that made by inspectors during the monitoring inspection. Nonetheless, this information has been used to enable effective and robust steps to be taken to tackle inadequate teaching.

An interim school improvement plan has been drawn up which focuses suitably on improving teaching and learning. This is usefully supported by new action plans for subject areas. Directors of learning have been tasked with overseeing and tracking students' performance in each year group. This has allowed the school to begin establishing a clearer picture of learners' performance and of where underachievement exists. Appropriate plans exist to train managers in the use of comparative assessment data which will assist the identification of underperformance. Data are now being used more extensively by subject leaders to track individuals' performance more closely and to compile regular summaries on students' progress and departmental effectiveness. Training has been held on the characteristics of good teaching. A number of staff have visited partner schools to observe good practice. These initiatives have raised teachers' understanding of what students can achieve. A whole-school planning format for lessons has been

introduced but this is not yet consistently applied. Training has been held on managing behaviour and greater use is now being made of an electronic system to record incidents of poor behaviour.

Links with a national organisation that supports specialist schools have been renewed and a development plan has been drawn up on how to develop the school's specialisms and increase their impact on standards and students' achievement. Regular newsletters are now issued to parents. Several questionnaires have been sent to parents and the school is aware of the continuing concerns of some about behaviour, homework and information on students' progress. The IEB is supportive of the headteacher and is beginning to provide challenge for the school leadership. It is well informed about school issues, although there is scope to broaden how it obtains information about the school's work. A parent champion has recently been appointed and is at the very early stages of developing links with parents.

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

- Improve leadership and management at all levels to ensure that provision is at least good in all areas – satisfactory

#### External support

The LA's statement of action was judged to be adequate and covers the key priorities for improvement. The LA has provided satisfactory support for the school. It moved promptly to support the school's improvement through the establishment of an IEB. Additional financial assistance has been provided as has advice from the LA's personnel services. An officer of the LA is a regular visitor to the school and provides advice to senior leaders and reports regularly to the IEB on the school's progress. Good use is made by the school of its partnership schools to assist with the training and development of staff.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve students' attendance and punctuality.
- Improve academic guidance, including the quality of marking and homework, so that all students know what they need to do next to improve their work.