

1 May 2008

Mr Ian Smith
Headteacher
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Salthouse Road
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Cumbria
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Dear Mr Smith

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF MILLOM SCHOOL; A
DCFS TECHNOLOGY AND ART COLLEGE**

Following my visit with Sara Morrissey HMI, Joe Clark, and Anthony Pearson 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 teachers may be appointed only with the agreement of the lead inspector

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 Children's Services for Cumbria LA.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF MILLOM SCHOOL; A DCFS TECHNOLOGY AND ART COLLEGE

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work; scrutinised documents; and met with the headteacher, groups of staff, including those with leadership responsibilities, groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the school was made subject to special measures, there have been no significant changes to its staff or the context of its work.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' overall achievement in Key Stages 3 and 4 remains inadequate. Standards are not as high as they should be and, too many pupils are not reaching the standards of which they are capable. This is due in large part to the legacy of previous underachievement but weaknesses in teaching and a lack of commitment to learning on the part of some pupils also play a part. Nonetheless, there are pockets of improvement in pupils' rates of progress. For example, in English, teachers' assessments and mock end of Key Stage 3 test results indicate a marked upward shift in the proportion of pupils in Year 7 and Year 9 who are working at or above the level expected for their age. Teachers' assessments in Year 11 show that inroads have been made into the underachievement in English language and mathematics. The school predicts an increase in the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more good GCSEs this year. This reflects the priority that has been given to raising standards in Year 11. Students in the sixth form continue to achieve satisfactorily; most are on track at least to meet their targets and the school's predictions would represent higher standards than in 2007.

The school has used data from assessments to identify focus groups of pupils for additional support. For the most part this has proved effective and, for many of these pupils, progress has accelerated.

Where improved achievement is evident, it is not always equally marked for boys and girls. For instance, in Key Stage 3 in English, more boys than girls are making the progress they should but in mathematics the reverse is the case.

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

- Raise standards and achievement, especially in English and science – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils say that expectations of behaviour have risen since the school was made subject to special measures; the school is 'stricter'. Their behaviour is at least satisfactory in lessons and around the school. They respond well in lessons when expectations are high, they have plenty of opportunities to learn through practical activities, and they feel the teachers enjoy teaching them. A significant minority of pupils, however, lack motivation, show little commitment to achievement, and do not adopt positive behaviour for learning, such as listening well to teachers and responding promptly to instructions. They are soon distracted from work if the pace of the lesson slips.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching varies from outstanding to inadequate. The proportion of lessons in which it is inadequate has reduced significantly but is still too high and there is not enough teaching of good or better quality. However, there are in-house models of very effective teaching. The lessons observed by inspectors nearly all confirmed the school's view of the quality of teaching and learning.

Teachers have benefited from additional training and support provided by the school's leaders and LA staff. This has had a positive impact on teaching, not least by helping some staff to bring their teaching up to a satisfactory standard. Improvements are evident in the planning of lessons, the quality of marking, and the extent to which pupils learn by doing rather than simply listening.

A common format for planning lessons has been introduced. This has generally been welcomed by staff and, tellingly, pupils have noticed better planning of lessons. This better planning has improved the structure and pace of lessons. Teachers plan a variety of activities in each lesson and review pupils' learning at intervals as the lesson moves along as well as at the end. However, the pace of some lessons is slowed because the pupils' approach to learning is too lackadaisical. The school has not established fully consistent routines and expectations to promote good attitudes and behaviour for learning.

There is a greater focus on what various groups of pupils are to learn in each lesson but work remains to be done to translate learning objectives into better progress for all pupils. There are two general shortcomings to tackle. Firstly, learning objectives are not always sufficiently sharply focused to support effective assessment of the progress pupils make. Secondly, too often the work set for pupils is not sufficiently differentiated to meet the wide range of learning needs in the class. Teachers have more information about what pupils have already achieved and the quality and accuracy of this assessment data has improved. In the most effective lessons teachers make good use of this information to tailor work to meet pupils' different capabilities and stages of learning.

The quality and effectiveness of marking, though inconsistent, has improved overall and there are examples of very good practice. There is an increased emphasis on showing pupils how they might improve their work and move closer to achieving their individual targets.

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

- Increase the pace and challenge in lessons and ensure that poor behaviour does not disrupt the learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

Since the school was made subject to special measures, it has stepped up the pace at which it is tackling its weaknesses. The headteacher and senior team know what needs to be done. They are tackling weaknesses with rigour and determination, providing a judicious blend of support and challenge for staff. Teachers welcome the practical guidance and support they receive from the senior team and LA staff. They say there is 'no denying' that their teaching is improving as a result. They also report improved communication, more sharing of good practice and, particularly significantly, more strategic use of data on pupils' standards and achievement.

The roles and responsibilities of subject leaders have been clarified and staff in these posts have received support, coaching and clear direction from senior staff. The effectiveness of these middle leaders varies but there is considerable enthusiasm and determination to make a difference. These staff know what is expected of them. Most are keeping a check on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in their subjects and have produced satisfactory plans for improvement. Their effectiveness has been enhanced by clearer lines of accountability within the management structure and by the work of the directors of learning who have a good strategic overview of standards, achievement and pupils' progress in each key stage. For the most part these middle leaders are now making a greater contribution to the drive for improvement and they have a more acute understanding of what needs to be done to raise standards. Nonetheless, there is a general need to develop leadership and management skills at this level in the school further.

Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and of pupils' progress has improved. Observations of many lessons have helped the senior team to have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching, to identify common training needs among the staff, and to determine foci for future monitoring. Pupils' work is assessed regularly. Effective management of this data provides management, teachers and governors with a clear view of the extent and location of underachievement. The data also provides a baseline against which to measure progress in the future.

Leadership and management of the sixth form remain satisfactory.

The governing body recognises the issues the school faces and is well informed about how they are being tackled. It is fulfilling its role as a critical friend of the school effectively.

The school's specialist status continues to promote involvement in the arts and it has been a factor in improvements to teaching and learning in drama and art. The school's specialist college targets have not been met but standards in some of the specialist subjects at GCSE are higher than the school's average.

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

- Ensure the rigorous and consistent implementation of new policies and systems to raise achievement – satisfactory
- Improve the rigour and effectiveness with which leaders and managers at all levels monitor the school's work.– satisfactory

External support

The LA has provided satisfactory support. Its statement of action is satisfactory but it which lacks precise indications of how the LA will evaluate the effectiveness of its support against measurable criteria, tightly linked to the school's own plan for improvement. The LA has undertaken extensive reviews of the work in all subjects. These gave helpful insights into the strengths and weakness of different departments. LA staff have played a part in the drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and improve the proportion of teaching that is good or better.
- Further develop the effectiveness of middle leadership.
- Improve the attitudes to learning of a minority of pupils.