

20 June 2008

Mr Phil Benaiges  
Headteacher Designate  
The Wensleydale School  
Richmond Road  
Leyburn  
North Yorkshire  
DL8 5HY

Dear Mr Benaiges,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE WENSLEYDALE SCHOOL

Following my visit with Peter Bannon, Additional Inspector and Elizabeth Charlesworth, Additional Inspector to your school on 18 and 19 June 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 January 2008. 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 not 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 Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE WENSLEYDALE SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 18 and 19 June 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher designate, groups of pupils, parents, school governors and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

### Context

Following the resignation of the headteacher an executive headteacher from a neighbouring school was appointed seven days prior to the Ofsted inspection in January 2008. The deputy headteacher has been appointed to the headship and will formally take up the position of substantive headteacher in September 2008.

### Achievement and standards

In 2007, the achievement of students in Year 11 was unsatisfactory. Students entered school with standards that were just above the national average. However, standards on leaving school were average with clear underachievement by boys. Performance in all of the core subjects was below what could have been expected given the starting points of students in Year 7. Standards at the end of Year 9 were above average which represented satisfactory achievement from Year 7.

The school has worked hard to redress this trend of inconsistent performance across subjects, between boys and girls and key stages. Monitoring systems are now in place that allows progress to be tracked every term. It is now possible to check whether students are on track in relation to their targets and support is targeted where it is most needed. However, these systems are new to the school and have not been in place long enough to ensure that students achieve as well as they can in the core subjects. The school has been successful in significantly reducing the gap between the achievement of boys and girls by, for example, improving the way that information and communication technology is used to motivate boys. This has had a positive impact on boys currently in Year 10.

The school has made it very clear that whilst current targets for achievement are set against that expected nationally, from the start of the next academic year, targets will be more challenging. This example of increased expectation is helping to promote the importance of meeting targets. Students are well aware of what their targets are. However, data from the tracking system is used inconsistently to promote challenge in lessons.

Progress against the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Establish robust, consistent systems to track the progress of all students and implement measures to tackle underperformance quickly to close the gaps between boys' and girls' performance – satisfactory.

#### Personal development and well-being

The standard of behaviour exhibited by pupils, although showing signs of improvement remains inadequate overall. It is better in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4, where a significant number of students display poor attitudes to learning and behaviour that is both over exuberant and lacking in respect towards their teachers. The school is experiencing a dual legacy of years where there has been a lack of clear leadership with regard to acceptable standards of behaviour and inadequate teaching that fails to inspire or motivate students. However, students feel that behaviour has improved since the beginning of the spring term 2008 and there is some evidence to support this. There is a direct link between the quality of teaching and behaviour. Lessons that engage students in their learning through purposeful, challenging and stimulating activities evoke a positive response and enhance learning. In these lessons student's behaviour is good. Teaching of this standard is too infrequent, particularly in Key Stage 4. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced and a whole-school behaviour policy is in place. A traffic light behaviour code has been established that is evident in all classrooms. Three pastoral learning support assistants mentor students and monitor their progress on a regular basis. This is beginning to have a positive impact. All of the strategies that have been put into place since the inspection in January 2008 reflect the schools determination to improve behaviour. However, issues surrounding the consistent implementation of agreed procedures by some staff remain.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Implement consistent approaches to improve students' behaviour, ensuring students know the standards expected of them - satisfactory.

#### Quality of provision

Although the quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate the school is able to demonstrate the effectiveness of its support for individual teachers. There is now a small proportion of outstanding teaching. Most lessons are planned to allow learning to take place in a structured way with learning objectives linked to expected outcomes. There is consistency across the school in the way teachers identify prior learning and state the activities to be followed. However, this planning is not yet refined enough to outline strategies and provision for gifted and talented students. It is also not sufficiently specific about how assessment will be carried out, so that students are involved in assessing their own and each other's work and identifying the next steps for improvement. There is inconsistency in the quality of marking with not enough guidance for students on how to improve their work.

In the best lessons teachers are dynamic and demanding of their students and these qualities support responsible learning. However, there is still too much inadequate

teaching, recognised by the school, and too much that is dull and mundane. In these lessons learning objectives are not clear and work does not have the right level of challenge, leading to students' attention and focus wandering and poor behaviour interrupting learning. All teachers are provided with information about their students' prior attainment and expected targets. There is, however, a step missing in the planning of work to match students' needs and aspirations. Assessment information is not translated into activities that support attainment at the expected National Curriculum or GCSE grade.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Improve teaching and learning by tailoring work to match students' needs and establishing consistent approaches to ensuring all students know how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve – satisfactory.

#### Leadership and management

The appointment of an executive headteacher in January 2008 together with expertise from the senior leadership team of Norton College has proved to be timely and effective. The senior leadership team has focused on strengthening the curriculum, improving teaching and learning and establishing a system to track the progress of individual pupils. These initiatives have been supported by a programme of professional development. Determined efforts have been made to maintain staff morale and retain the support of parents. This has been successful to a large extent. A revised leadership and faculty structure that clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of senior staff, thereby introducing increased levels of accountability has been introduced. However, leadership in the core subjects is insecure. The head of science took up his post at Easter 2008, the head of mathematics is to commence in September and the school is looking to appoint a leader for English in January 2009, following the resignation of the current postholder. Elsewhere in the school there is evidence of good middle leadership and management in relation to securing consistent approaches to quality assure teaching and learning. Leaders of art, physical education, design technology and modern foreign languages are using data to inform planning and are pursuing high standards of teaching and learning. Work has started on the production of faculty self-evaluation documents and this is supporting the action planning process designed to bring about improvements. Staff are more engaged in discussing issues relating to teaching and learning than ever before. The senior leadership team are not, at present, sufficiently pro-active in driving the implementation of agreed policy and practice in classrooms and in corridors. A united approach by all leaders, but particularly senior leaders, to secure improvements in relation to teaching and learning and students' behaviour is not sufficiently demonstrable through sustained presence and influence where it counts, in classrooms and in key areas in the school.

The impact of specialist college status in raising standards has been negligible. Standards remain below the national average. There is no evidence to indicate that the science faculty is influencing good practice across the school and is currently not in a position to do so. However, the recent appointment of a head of science has strengthened the capacity of the faculty to improve. He has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses and has a clear idea of how to secure improvements.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Ensure middle leaders adopt consistent approaches to quality assure teaching and learning – satisfactory.

#### External support

The LA's statement of action meets requirements and clearly outlines the support given to the school. The LA has effectively overseen the deployment of an executive headteacher and other key members of staff from an 'outstanding' school within the county to augment the current leadership team. Support from the school improvement partner, curriculum consultants and authority advisers is on going and well received by the school. The LA is providing a good level of support.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Eradicate weak teaching, including the non-implementation of agreed policies and practice relating to behaviour management.
- Improve student's attitudes to learning and behaviour during lessons and around the school.
- Ensure that senior leaders, together with middle management, are more pro-active in leading and driving the implementation of strategies designed to secure improvement.