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12 November 2008

Ms Gill Broom
Headteacher
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Lancashire
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Dear Ms Broom

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Hameldon Community College

Following my visit with John Paddick and Susan Walsh, Additional Inspectors, to your college on 10 and 11 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 Standards at Lancashire LA.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite McCloy HMI
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF HAMELDON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the associate headteacher, a number of staff members, and representatives from the governing body and the local authority (LA). Inspectors also talked with some of the students around the college or in classrooms.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in May 2008 the college has completed a planned re-organisation of staffing levels. This was necessary due to the reduced standard admission number in preparation for the move to a new building in 2010. This will have capacity for just 750 students with enhanced provision for 20 students with a hearing impairment. The process resulted in a reduction of 14 teachers and 5 support staff, some due to movement to new posts and others resulting from severances and termination of contracts. The college presently has just over 900 students in total, although the number who joined Year 7 in September fell considerably short of the 150 that the college had planned for.

Achievement and standards

In May 2008 the college's assessments indicated that challenging targets were within reach and standards were likely to be higher in the summer tests and examinations. Unfortunately, final results were disappointing and standards remain below average at the end of both key stages. Within this overall picture there are some variations. Achievement in English at Key Stage 3 improved over the 2007 results, although this was not replicated in mathematics and science. Overall performance at or above the expected level for 14 year-olds remains around 10% below the national average in all three subjects. Difficulties with the national marking of Key Stage 3 tests meant that results were unreliable, but the college's own assessments substantiated the view that targets were not achieved.

In GCSE examinations, the proportion of students achieving grades A*-C in English showed a small improvement since 2007, to reach just 5% below the national average. Disappointing mathematics results meant that just 40% of students achieved A*-C grades in that subject. This had an adverse effect on the overall proportion of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A*-C with English and mathematics included, which at 35% is well below average. The college has analysed a number of factors which contributed to this disappointing figure, including examination entry at appropriate levels and the contribution of coursework. Appropriate action is being taken to address these issues and students' current work

in class suggests slight improvement in standards in mathematics. Similarly, current work and assessments in English suggest that years 10 and 11 are making satisfactory and in some cases good progress based on their prior attainment at Key Stage 3.

Just under half of Year 11 students achieved 5 or more GCSEs overall at grades A*-C. This is just 1% above the college's 2007 results and remains over 10% below the national average. There were some improvements in individual subjects at GCSE compared to the college's performance in the previous year. For example, better results were seen in science, English literature and French. Other successes included the GCSE Engineering course in which 60% of the students entered reached levels A*-C.

The college's specialism in science and enterprise is beginning to have a positive effect on raising attainment. Although not all of the targets were met in 2008, there were strong results in the separate sciences at GCSE physics, chemistry and biology: in the cohort of 25 gifted and talented students, almost all achieved A*-C grades in each of the sciences after covering the course content at lunchtimes and after college sessions. Business studies and information and communication technology (ICT) results were better than in 2007. Current coursework indicates that there will be a further rise in ICT results in 2009.

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

- Raise levels of achievement – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

The pastoral system is continuing to develop but the process has been slowed by some staff changes. Better use of IT systems is improving the speed of communication enabling a more rapid response to issues with behaviour and attendance. Incidents of poor behaviour are being more effectively recorded, leading to a more considered approach in terms of both managing teaching and learning and dealing with the students themselves. The college recognised shortcomings regarding the use of the isolation room and although there is still a form of internal exclusion the focus is now much more firmly on altering students' behaviour. Staff absence has held back developments in this area and it is too early to judge the full impact of the new Reparation Room. However the number of fixed-term exclusions, although still quite high, is continuing to fall. Year 7 students are settling in well and those who have additional needs that may make it hard for them to access a secondary curriculum report that provision in the Gateway Room is helping them to become more mature.

Students' attitudes and behaviour are still variable. Many students work hard in lessons and respond well to teachers. A minority, usually among the average or below average ability groups, have weak self-control and do not always give

teachers the respect that they deserve. Their lack of effort is a significant factor in their underachievement. Most teachers apply the school's behaviour policy but the rigour in which it is applied is variable, reflecting teachers' inconsistent expectations regarding behaviour. Many teachers are working hard to develop a better range of learning strategies including more opportunities for active learning by working in pairs and groups. Unfortunately some students lack the maturity and self-discipline to cope with this and react inappropriately, resulting in low level disruption and some silly behaviour. There are many instances of good relationships between teachers and students, but staffing issues have led to changes in subject teachers, form tutors and those members of staff responsible for students' personal development. These factors make it more difficult for good relationships to be developed and sustained, although staffing is stable now and there are fewer staff absences.

Early indications are that improvements to attendance are being sustained particularly in Years 9 to 11. However, attendance rates in Years 7 and 8 are not as good as those reported for a similar period last year. The relatively newly appointed attendance officer is doing sterling work. She has a very clear idea of where improvements need to be made and of how to implement them. Good systems are continually being developed to reward good attendance and more is being done to tackle inadequate attendance. Nevertheless, attendance rates are still below average and erratic attendance holds back the achievement of a significant number of students. An expanding alternative curriculum with more opportunities for extended work placements is being developed. This is beginning to have a positive effect on the attitudes and behaviour of some students. Its impact needs to be carefully monitored to guarantee the quality of the provision and to make sure that students are able to effectively develop their basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

The behaviour of students at lunchtimes has improved and these are much calmer times than they had been in the past. Effective management and supervision of students has contributed to this, along with the range of activities provided by staff, some of which are due to specific requests made by students themselves.

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

- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning – satisfactory

Quality of provision

There is considerable evidence to show that teaching and learning are steadily developing in response to the college's relentless and effective efforts to improve them. A well co-ordinated approach is bringing far greater variety to lessons in an attempt to engage and interest the students more fully than previously. Senior managers have an accurate view of the quality of work in the classroom and have ensured that the many intended improvements are reaching all subjects. Where teachers are occasionally struggling with some of their classes, a good support

programme run by strong classroom practitioners is firstly identifying weaknesses and secondly making suggestions about how to eliminate them. Consequently, although the proportion of good teaching, around two-fifths, has remained the same as at the previous monitoring visit, the pace of improvement has been maintained. This is because satisfactory lessons are now beginning to be characterised by a wider variety of approaches and a better response from students.

Planning is improving as teachers follow a common system for setting out clearly what the students are to do and learn in lessons. Plans identify starter activities, a main learning section and a plenary. The best of these often break down the main activity into further timed modules so that students cover a lot of ground in an hour, including opportunities to review or self-assess their learning in the plenary. Occasionally, however, teachers still don't expect students to do as much as they could in the time available.

Teachers routinely share the lesson objectives with their students. Lessons now offer a wider variety of approach than previously. For example, teachers are including many more enjoyable practical activities that enable students to work in pairs and groups. These are beginning to assist with the development of social and personal skills. Teachers say that the improved lessons have generally been successful in improving students' attention to their work, engagement in class, and their conduct.

Occasionally, however, lessons are still characterised by a rather slow pace. This is sometimes caused by students becoming disengaged and wasting time. There are still some instances when the negative behaviour and attitudes of some students reduce the planned pace of learning. This contrasts with the better lessons where good class management and relationships, effective time management and a strong pace are consistent features.

Marking of work is more thorough than previously and frequently tells students clearly what they need to do to improve. It also identifies the standard of their work in relation to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. This is also becoming a more consistent feature of work in the classroom. In the best practice, teachers actually show students examples of previously marked work so that they know exactly what they have to do to reach the highest standards. Occasionally, teachers do not challenge untidy work or poorly presented diagrams. This is a weakness.

The college can point to several examples of really successful coaching and assistance for teachers. Not only has the general format of lessons improved, but in several instances individual teachers' performance has improved substantially from unsatisfactory to good.

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

Over the last two terms the headteacher has benefited from a positive and effective partnership with the associate headteacher appointed by the LA. This has enabled her to focus on strategic planning in the knowledge that operational leadership and the day-to-day running of the college has been well supported. Self-evaluation is rigorous and honest, and leaders are clear about where performance is improving and where it still falls short of their raised expectations. The quality of self-evaluation is strengthened by a clear programme of planned monitoring events so that staff are well informed and understand what is expected of them. The findings from these monitoring activities are used to update the college's self evaluation document on a regular basis. More staff are involved in contributing to this, for example through middle leaders' training and involvement in 'learning walks'. The role of the progress development managers has been reviewed to ensure increased accountability for their responsibilities in monitoring the progress of groups of students.

The leadership team recognised flaws in the college's target-setting and achievement tracking system last term. These led to some misinterpretation of the gap between students' predicted levels and grades and those that were actually being achieved. It had contributed to the overoptimistic prediction of improvement in the 2008 tests and examinations. As a result of this, changes have been made to the system and whole-staff training in assessment has taken place. Leaders evaluated the impact of intervention programmes for Year 11 students last year. They found that the selection of strategies and identification of groups of students who would benefit from these were not always appropriate, leading to variable success. Changes have been made to this year's intervention groups to remedy the weaknesses identified.

Senior leaders are working well together as a cohesive team, and the skills of middle leaders are developing well, although the college acknowledges that this remains variable in some subjects. In their discussions with inspectors, core subject leaders demonstrated a clear understanding of how their department is performing and what needs to be done next to further improve teaching, learning and achievement. This is an indication of how far the college has moved on during a significant period of turbulence and challenge since its opening in September 2006. Most staff are now responding well to increased accountability and the raised expectations of senior leaders. Agreed policies are being implemented more consistently across the college, although more work is needed in some aspects, for example in assessment and target setting, and in further raising expectations of students' work and behaviour.

The college regularly seeks the views of students through questionnaires and interviews. These provide evidence of a growing affiliation with the college than had

previously been the case. The student council is developing well and was proud to have been able to promote good publicity for the college, for example for Hameldon's radio station and its Fair Trade School designation.

The strong and committed group of governors hold the college to account for its performance and have accurate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. They can clearly see where real improvements have been made since the college's last inspection, for example in leadership, management and teaching. Governors and leaders understand that one of the key factors in being able to translate these improvements into raised achievement lies in the college's work to develop a strong learning culture which incorporates more positive attitudes and higher aspirations on the part of students and all staff.

The senior leadership team is now working at full strength following the return of one of the deputy headteachers. With effect from January 2009, the college has made an additional key appointment to the post of assistant headteacher with responsibility for leading professional practice. A new leader of the Enterprise faculty and the school's specialism also takes up their post in January.

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

- Improve the consistency of leadership and management – satisfactory

External support

The college continues to benefit from the regular monitoring, challenge and support of the LA and the college's School Improvement Partner. Senior leaders have appreciated and made the most of the LA's generous allocation of consultant support. This is directed well towards the college's changing needs during a time of staffing movement and middle leadership development. Training and joint working between senior and middle leaders and LA advisers has contributed to the college's improved quality assurance systems. There are now plans to support the leadership team in ensuring that teachers improve their skills in assessing student performance accurately.

Priorities for further improvement

The college should continue its work on the four priorities identified in the February 2007 inspection, along with further developing the contribution of its Business and Enterprise specialism to raising achievement.