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11 December 2008

Mr Phil Benaiges
Headteacher
The Wensleydale School
Richmond Road
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North Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Benaiges

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Wensleydale School

Following my visit with Ross Parker and Robert Jones, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 9 and 10 December 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 January 2008. 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 subject to discussion with 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 Education for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE WENSLEYDALE SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 9-10 December 2008.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA) and groups of students.

Context

A substantive headteacher has been in post since September 2008. New appointments have been made to lead mathematics (September 2008) and English (January 2009). The school is receiving local authority organised support by way of two experienced deputy headteachers and two assistant headteachers seconded from successful schools in North Yorkshire.

Achievement and standards

In 2008, the achievement of students in Year 11 was inadequate. From average standards on entry, students reached below average standards overall in Year 11 and the gap between boys and girls was significantly greater than it should have been. The school was surprised by these results because its own predictions had indicated that standards would be higher. Standards at the end of Year 9 were above average which represented at least satisfactory achievement from Year 7. Current predictions are based on assessments which managers are confident are more accurate because they are based on formal tests or have been moderated with local authority support. Senior staff have worked hard to raise teachers' expectations of what students can achieve, and to develop their understanding of data so that they can evaluate students' progress more realistically. Current targets match the progress students are expected to make nationally and leaders are working to convince teachers that more challenging targets are achievable. Indications are that students are now making better progress, and the current Year 11 are expected to get close to the schools' targets. This is the result of weak teaching that they experienced in previous years. The very careful tracking system has identified each student in Year 11 who is predicted to underachieve in the 2009 examinations. A monitoring programme has been planned to help these students improve their performance and to establish reasons for their current weak progress. The school has worked hard to reduce the difference in progress made by boys and girls. There has been a clear impact in the current Year 11 where data suggest that boys are now doing as well as girls and in some subjects have reversed the trend. However, in Year 10, there are still a number of boys who are currently underachieving and, as yet, the school has not identified the reason why. To date, strategies have been strongly focused on Key Stage 4. Students in Key Stage 3 are aware of their targets

and data from the tracking system are increasingly used to promote challenge in lessons. However, the school is not yet tracking students' progress well enough in order to identify how they could make better progress in this key stage.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- 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 throughout the school has improved significantly since the previous monitoring visit and is now satisfactory overall. This has not happened by chance but is the result of a determined and systematic effort to improve behaviour by senior leaders. The senior leadership team has played a major part in securing improvement. Senior leaders are highly visible around the school, challenging unacceptable behaviour at the beginning and end of the day, break times, and lunchtime. During lessons, school leaders visit classrooms on a regular basis to support staff and to monitor conduct. This demonstrable show of leadership has sent clear messages to staff and students in terms of expectations. Students are left in no doubt as to what constitutes acceptable behaviour and this is underpinned by a clear code of conduct together with appropriate sanctions which are adhered to by all staff. The impact of these measures can be seen in lessons where students listen to their teachers, respond positively to questions and do not disrupt the learning of others. The manner in which students move around the school has also improved since the previous monitoring visit. They are less boisterous, more courteous and proceed with a sense of purpose. A significant factor is that the overwhelming majority of students recognise that changes are afoot and welcome what they perceive to be an improved learning environment. Students are enjoying their education and many say that the activities they undertake are fun. However, there remains some work to do. A minority of students, boys in the main, while conforming in terms of behaviour, still fail to display good learning attitudes and this results in underachievement.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning have improved since the previous monitoring visit. The attitudes to learning of most students and the behaviour in lessons of the overwhelming majority have improved due to learning tasks which are often varied and interesting. This has resulted in improved relationships in the classroom

between students and between students and adults, creating an atmosphere within the school conducive to effective learning.

Lesson planning has improved; the introduction of a common lesson plan format has helped achieve a level of consistency in the school. Work is now better matched to students' abilities. Objectives are shared with students to help them understand what they are learning and why. Often though, students are unsure of what to do to achieve a high standard. This is because teachers do not always give students clear success criteria detailing what successful work should look like. Opportunities for students to work collaboratively are enhancing their learning and developing their communication skills. Teachers are now giving students more opportunities to work independently, but many students do not have the skills to do this effectively. There are increasing opportunities for students to mark their own and each others' work. In these lessons, students are more engaged with their learning and, consequently, make good progress. Not all teachers do this, however, and, consequently, learning is not as effective in these lessons.

There are good examples of teachers using information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to enhance the learning experience for students, particularly in geography, modern foreign languages and mathematics. There is still much to be done for this good practice to be embedded across the school.

The school's recent drive to improve the quality of questioning has had a positive effect in the classroom. Students are now asked questions which challenge them well. Sometimes, teachers spend too long on an activity, not leaving enough time at the end of lessons to review learning and ensure the objectives have been met. The marking of students' work has improved and they are now more aware of what they need to do to improve. However, inconsistencies remain, on occasions; marking is superficial and irregular and this does not help students to improve.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Leadership and management

The current headteacher took up his position at the beginning of the academic year. He has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has wasted no time in tackling rigorously the areas for improvement. He is ably supported by the senior leadership team and by senior staff seconded from other schools within the authority. A feature of the current senior leadership team is the high profile that they have around school. This pro-active approach is helping to embed the range of initiatives designed to bring about improvement, whether it be behaviour or teaching and learning related. Leadership in the core subjects is now

more secure. The heads of mathematics and science have a realistic view of what needs to be done to raise standards. They are actively involved in monitoring the quality of provision and in supporting staff that are not performing effectively. The improved use of data has enabled these subject leaders to address pockets of underachievement more effectively and has improved the accuracy of assessments. However, other middle leaders of non core subjects are not yet sufficiently involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and lack the leadership skills required to bring about lasting change. The school is aware of this and has plans in place to address the matter with support from the LA and staff seconded from a neighbouring successful school. Until these weaknesses have been successfully tackled, the capacity to improve and, most importantly, to sustain improvement remains inadequate.

The impact of specialist college status in raising standards has been limited. The school has received a detailed evaluation of the current specialist status provision which identified a range of shortcomings in provision and in impact. Senior leaders have responded to these criticisms with detailed and realistic plans to improve the curriculum, to develop areas of excellence which they can share across the school and with their partners, and to improve standards in the specialist subject. There has been some progress in improving the organisation of the curriculum and the standard of teaching in science. As yet, there has been no coherent evaluation of the impact of other steps to improve the specialist provision.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

External support

The LA is providing a good level of support to the school through consultants and by arranging the secondment of senior teachers from neighbouring schools to help develop key aspects of the schools' work. The LA is well aware of the need to review the level of support and is determined to tailor future provision in line with the schools developing capacity to sustain improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the collection, analysis and use of data at Key Stage 3.
- Improve the quality of marking so that the good practice demonstrated by some teachers is reflected throughout the school.
- Develop the use of ICT as a teaching tool.
- Ensure that leaders of foundation subjects are involved in monitoring the quality of provision within their own faculties.