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17 October 2008

Mr Tarun Kapur
Executive Headteacher and National Leader of Education
Parrs Wood High School
Wilmslow Road
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Manchester
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Dear Mr Kapur

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Parrs Wood High School

Following my visit with Jon Lovgreen, Kathleen Harris, Stephen Rowland and Mary Liptrot, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 15 and 16 October 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 November 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 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 City Council.

Yours sincerely

M McIlroy
H M Inspector

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Parrs Wood High School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 October 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 40 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, nominated staff, several groups of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), the parent champion and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, two members of the IEB have resigned, 26 teaching staff have left the school and 11 have joined it. A small number of temporary teachers are covering the classes of staff who are unavoidably absent and several others are employed on long-term contracts. A number of internal appointments have been made to a recently introduced management structure.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising because managers continue to keep students' progress high on the school agenda. Provisional results at GCSE level in 2008 indicate that the school broadly met its targets. This represented satisfactory overall progress by students who, in Years 10 and 11, redressed their previous underachievement. In English and mathematics, a greater proportion of students achieved a grade C or above at GCSE, although the increase was more marked in English. As a result, the key benchmark of the proportion of students achieving five or more A*–C grades at GCSE, including mathematics and English increased by 7% to 51%. There were notable increases in the proportion of students gaining A*/A grades across a range of subjects. However, in 2008, GCSE results in subjects such as art, business studies, French, geography, information and communication technology (ICT), physical education, sociology and Spanish were well below what was expected. These results, and the very variable A*/A pass rates between subjects, show that too much inconsistency remains. The school failed to meet its targets in the subjects of its technology specialism, apart from textiles, where they were exceeded.

Careful analysis of the 2007 results helped the school identify the need for girls to do better, and in 2008 this was the case. While the gap in performance between boys and girls has been effectively narrowed, the school accepts that some lower ability boys are not doing well enough. The school now has more evidence of relative subject performance, and is using this to make decisions about which syllabuses best meet students' needs and where early entry to exams benefits them. Senior managers use such analyses to challenge the performance of departments and teachers. However, some analyses miss key points. Few middle managers are skilled in using such analyses to gain sharp insights into the relative performance of their

subject areas. The school has detailed evidence that standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are set to rise again in 2009 and has set challenging targets.

Standards at Key Stage 3 are improving. The school's unvalidated test results for 2008, and the school's own tracking systems, show few students who did not make at least satisfactory progress. The policy for deciding which students to enter early for end of key stage tests has been sharpened. Students have a much clearer idea about the progress they are making in English and mathematics and there are good curriculum arrangements for early GCSE entry or additional qualifications in both subjects at Key Stage 4. The gradual improvement in the quality of teaching, and the more consistent use of data to set progress targets for each student in every subject are also having a positive impact.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour in and around the school is satisfactory as a result of a high staff presence, especially at break and lunchtimes. The school's behaviour policy has been changed to enable incidents in lessons to be dealt with immediately and more effectively. Students speak positively about the impact this is having on those who do misbehave in lessons. Data provided by the school indicates that the number of exclusions decreased last year when compared to the previous academic year. However, poor behaviour still occurs in some lessons, particularly where teachers' expectations are low and work is not sufficiently challenging. Attendance last year remained broadly in line with the previous year's figures, which were similar to national averages. Since the start of term, the attendance of students in Key Stage 3 has improved when compared to the same period last year. Attendance and punctuality are weakest in Year 11. A more robust and consistent approach is being taken to encourage students to arrive on time at school and to monitor and follow up latecomers. However, this could be sharpened further to ensure that fewer students arrive late in classrooms for the start of the first lesson of the day. In most lessons, students work well together in class when asked to do so. A new system for choosing students to act as school councillors has been adopted and councillors are starting to play a greater role in the development of the school.

Quality of provision

The school has made satisfactory progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Well over half of the lessons observed during the inspection were good and there were some examples of excellent teaching and learning. However, a significant proportion of satisfactory practice persists and the number of inadequate lessons observed was greater than that found at the previous monitoring visit. Senior leaders have worked with staff to develop a greater shared understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning. The monitoring of these is becoming

more rigorous and has enabled many teachers to focus on improving specific aspects of their work. Good practice is now being shared more effectively and staff training is largely focused on improving students' learning.

In good or better lessons, relationships between students and staff were good. Teachers communicated clear expectations both about acceptable behaviour and about what students were intended to learn. This contributed to students' good behaviour and attentiveness in these lessons. Planning was detailed and the content of the lessons and teaching strategies were closely linked to intended learning outcomes. The level of challenge was well matched to the abilities of students and the pace of teaching was brisk and businesslike. Students worked effectively in pairs and groups when asked to do so and could comment meaningfully on their own and others' work. Teachers constantly checked students' understanding of their work to ensure that learning was secure. In satisfactory and weaker lessons, planning was not always clear and the pace of learning was not maintained. Students were not always sure of what was expected of them. The level of work was not clearly matched to students' different abilities and was at times not challenging enough, which meant that the progress made by students was not as good as it could have been. Teachers also explained too much rather than enabling students to learn through answering searching questions and assessing their own work. Low level disruption was evident in some classes and this impeded the pace of learning. In these lessons, teachers did not always make expectations of behaviour clear enough at the start of lessons or tackle such disruption promptly.

A number of changes have been made to the curriculum in Key Stage 3. Increased time has been allocated for the teaching of mathematics and English. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has also been increased. Data on the prior attainment of Year 7 students has been more effectively used to group students to ensure that continuity in learning, following transfer from primary schools, is maintained. Two discrete classes, based on a primary school approach, have been created for the most vulnerable students in Year 7 in order to help them adjust successfully to secondary school life. A cross-curricular policy aimed at developing links between literacy, numeracy and ICT has been produced. Teachers are beginning to incorporate elements of this into schemes of work and into lesson planning to make learning more effective and relevant for students. However, in some classes, planning for this more integrated approach is not always translated into practice and opportunities are missed. Useful improvements have also been made to the school's computerised virtual learning environment through the development of a home-school online curriculum which is aimed at supporting vulnerable students. Booklets detailing the curriculum on offer in each year group have been produced, partly as a result of parental requests for more information. The impact of the school's specialisms in enriching the curriculum enrichment is limited. Developments in this area are still in their infancy. However, last term the technology and the expressive and performing arts departments worked closely with other faculties to bring a Shakespeare play to life.

The improvement of the academic guidance students receive was identified as an additional priority for the school at the last monitoring visit. The school has made satisfactory progress in improving this. The new curriculum guides include information on the homework required in each subject area, useful websites, other sources of information and key assessment dates. A homework timetable is also now in place. Students are aware of their target grades in all subjects. However, the procedures for informing students of the level they are currently working at vary between subjects. Marking in some subjects enables students to have a good understanding of how to improve their work. However, this is not yet consistent across the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- 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 – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The executive headteacher has continued to drive forward changes in how the school is led and managed with great determination. These improvements are increasingly making staff at all levels more accountable for their work. They are also continuing to raise expectations and understanding throughout the school of what can be achieved in terms of standards and are encouraging teachers to focus more on the progress students make.

A number of weaknesses in teaching and leadership have been tackled. A new line management structure has been introduced and the senior leadership team slimmed down. Suitably qualified staff from within the school have been appointed to a number of these positions and the remaining key posts are due to be filled shortly. Training, including much coaching by the executive headteacher, has taken place to develop these senior leaders in their new responsibilities. Consequently, the school is beginning to build its capacity to improve. Job descriptions are in place for all teaching staff thus ensuring a greater understanding by teachers of what is expected of them. The process of restructuring the main staffing body in line with statutory requirements has begun. Arrangements for the performance management of teachers have been put in place. These are now appropriately linked to the academic performance of specific groups of pupils.

The mini-school structure has been replaced by a new pastoral system, based on year groups, led by heads of learning. A number of student support managers have recently been appointed to deal with pastoral issues. This has enabled the heads of learning to concentrate on the academic progress students are making in the year group for which they are responsible. This new system also provides clearer lines of communication for parents who are concerned about the progress of their children. These managers are accountable to a deputy headteacher who meets with them regularly for training. As a result, they are beginning to develop expertise in using and analysing school assessment data to track and improve students' achievement.

A recent benefit of this greater use of performance data has been the reassignment of some students to classes where their needs can be met more appropriately. There is scope to develop these managers' understanding of nationally available comparative performance data. There is, as yet, no formal mechanism by which the new heads of learning can meet regularly with the directors of faculties to discuss students' progress.

A number of steps have been taken to improve teaching and learning which are contributing to the steady improvement of these areas. Opportunities have been created to enable staff from two partner schools to work alongside teachers in order to model good practice. A new format for planning lessons has been introduced, and checks are made on its use. Nonetheless, there are still major inconsistencies in how effectively this system is used by teachers. The staff handbook has been usefully revised and contains appropriate guidance for teachers, including those new to the school, on policies and procedures, expectations of staff and on what constitutes good teaching. However, there is still considerable variation in how well this guidance has been adopted by staff, an example being expectations of students' behaviour in class. Having broadly identified where good and outstanding teaching is, the school has begun to focus on weaker teaching although the full impact of this approach on this has yet to be seen. Following recent training with the LA, arrangements for the monitoring of teaching and learning have been refined and sharpened. The number of senior staff involved in this process has been expanded. Both heads of learning and directors of faculties have received some training in carrying out lesson observations and giving feedback to staff. They are starting to check on the quality of the work of colleagues and students but the effectiveness and impact of these measures vary from department to department.

Changes have also been made to the tutorial system to enable form tutors to focus more on aspects of behaviour, homework and learning. The time allocated for this, and for year group assemblies, has been extended but too often is not used well. A new school improvement plan has been drawn up which focuses appropriately on the raising of standards and improving teaching and learning. It assesses the progress the school is making in these areas and as such is developing the school's understanding of self-evaluation techniques. The improvement plan is suitably supported by action plans for each subject area, although these vary in the level of detail they contain. These have been monitored by senior leaders and amendments have been suggested.

The impact of the school's two specialisms on its work has been limited. Many academic targets set for specialist subjects were not achieved in 2008 and some were missed by a considerable margin. A deputy headteacher has been made responsible for oversight of the specialisms. With the support and encouragement of senior leaders, the profile of the specialisms, both within and outside the school is rising. Links have been being strengthened with primary schools and industry as well as with other departments in the school. The work of the specialisms now features prominently in the new school development plan and challenging targets have been set for these subjects.

The chair of the IEB is well informed about the school's work through detailed performance information provided by the school, and members of the board are involved in the appointments of new staff. The IEB provides appropriate challenge for the school leadership. The chair, and other members of the IEB, are regular visitors to the school but information gathered on these visits is not yet formally reported to the IEB. The parent champion has developed links with parents well, for example by attending parents evenings, and effective steps have been taken by the school to ensure that parents can contact her easily.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

The LA has provided satisfactory support for the school. Senior officers visit the school regularly and advice on staffing, finance, curriculum and training issues has been provided as well as financial assistance. A senior officer has worked alongside senior and middle managers to develop and check the school's approach to monitoring. Close links are maintained with two partner schools, one of which is a National Support School, and both have assisted in the development of teaching and learning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that expectations of students' behaviour in classrooms are consistently applied by teachers.