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Mr Rob Arrowsmith
Acting Headteacher
Pathways Special School
Tennyson Avenue
Grangetown
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Dear Mr Arrowsmith

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Pathways Special School

Following my visit with David Muir HMI, to your school on 24 and 25 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 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 – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the agreement of the monitoring HMI.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State the chair of governors and the Interim Executive Director for Children, Families and Learning for Redcar and Cleveland LA.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Pathways Special School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, members of the teaching and support staff, groups of students, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been no major changes to the school since the previous inspection. Specialist teachers of science and music have joined the school, the latter a part-time appointment.

Achievement and standards

There have been no further external assessments since the previous visit. The school's GCSE course work in English has been selected for moderation by the awarding body, and the school's assessment has been judged to be accurate. It confirms that students are now making better progress in English at Key Stage 4; all Year 11 students have achieved a grade at A* to G on the coursework and spoken elements of their examination. Students' achievement in English at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is improving because of specialist teaching. The reorganisation of teaching groups at the start of this term is another contributory factor. Students are responding well to the increased challenge of the examination requirements in English. The school's records indicate that Year 11 students are on track to achieve 5 A* to G GCSE passes or better. This demonstrates the impact of the school's improved curriculum in providing better access for students to external qualifications. It builds on subjects such as art in which students have achieved successfully in the past. Evidence from lessons observed shows there is some variability in students' progress. Students make better progress in those lessons where activities are engaging and well-matched to their abilities and interests, and where behaviour is managed well.

The school has continued to focus on literacy across the curriculum, an issue highlighted on previous monitoring inspections. There is evidence that staff have greater awareness of the issues and ongoing training is developing their expertise. The school has also established a 'reading recovery programme'. However, there is limited impact of literacy across the curriculum to date.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards in English in Key Stages 3 and 4 – good

Personal development and well-being

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, the school had recently introduced changes in its philosophy and practice in relation to behaviour. As these changes have become more embedded, they have continued to encourage students to take more responsibility for their learning and behaviour. There has been a further significant reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions and in other significant incidents of challenging behaviour. The improvements in the curriculum have also ensured that students are more effectively engaged in their lessons. Students are very positive about the changes in the school, reporting that relationships between themselves and between students and staff have improved as a direct result of the clarity of expectations provided by the new systems. They say that they are increasingly responsible for managing their own behaviour and know that they can take time out to calm down if they need to do so. The use of personal mentors has also continued to provide good support for students and improve communication between the school and families. This has had a positive impact on students' attitudes in school. Nevertheless, there is still too much low level disruption in some lessons, which can be an obstacle to the amount of learning taking place. This is often because the lesson has not been planned effectively to meet the needs and interests of all students in the class.

The school's work on developing strategies to monitor and tackle poor attendance has had a significant impact on attendance since the previous visit. Attendance levels have risen through the year, due to the school's robust and decisive action. When required, the school has used strong measures, including fixed-penalty fines, to ensure increased attendance. The 'school on wheels' initiative is promoting attendance effectively as it offers well-targeted support for students who are poor attenders or who are disengaged. This flexible provision is able to provide ongoing support over a period of time for those with more complex needs or 'rapid response' intervention for students who are undergoing some short term turbulence in their lives. This initiative has successfully supported students in their return to education.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve students' attitudes and behaviour – satisfactory
- Improve attendance – good

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remains similar to the previous monitoring inspection. The best teaching is based on high expectations of what students can achieve. In good lessons teachers plan activities carefully to meet students' interests and build on what students already know and can do. The school's behaviour system is used well in these lessons to promote learning as well as good behaviour. However, as before, inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and learning and, as yet, there is not enough teaching which is consistently good. The school's planning format is being used, but teachers are not always using it to best effect to

set the learning in context or identify strategies for differentiation. Although teaching assistants often respond well to students' needs and encourage students by, for example, taking a turn in reading, lesson plans do not always set out how teaching assistants can be used most effectively to promote learning. Although there is some good marking, it is too variable. The best marking celebrates achievement and gives guidance on how to improve whereas other marking is cursory, or comments only on effort. The school has identified the need to share good practice in teaching and marking but this is embryonic at present because other pressing priorities have occupied staff.

The curriculum has continued to develop and is increasingly broad and varied, offering a wider choice for students. More pathways are now well established for students across the school. These pathways offer more opportunity to tailor the curriculum to suit individual needs, abilities and interests. One example of this is photography, which is very popular amongst the Key Stage 4 students and has provided an alternative route into college for students. The school has continued to develop further links with other providers to add to the curriculum; the federation arrangements make a significant contribution to the enhanced curriculum. The lunch and break time activities and opportunities to socialise in a constructive and positive social environment continue to have a positive impact on relationships and attitudes within the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Create more and better opportunities for Key Stage 4 students to achieve success – good
- Increase the time given to students' education and ensure that the statutory requirements for the curriculum are met – This was not a focus of this inspection as it had been achieved on the previous visit.

Leadership and management

The school's leaders have built on the significant steps taken at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. The school and its leaders continue to benefit from working within the federation. Much time and energy has been focused on establishing the new ethos and embedding the principles and practice of behaviour management. The impact can be seen, for example, in the calmer atmosphere in school and fewer incidents of disruptive behaviour. Relationships with parents are stronger, reflecting the work of staff acting as personal mentors as well as the efforts of senior leaders. Supported well by the executive headteacher, the acting headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and use a variety of approaches to monitor the work of the school. However, as they acknowledge, there is more to be done to establish robust, frequent and systematic monitoring of the work of the school, especially teaching and learning. The governing body also has yet to strengthen its role in holding the school fully to account. Nevertheless, the governing body is currently at its strongest in terms of membership, including parent and community

governors, as reflected in the attendance at the most recent meeting. This is a significant step forward. Training is in hand to develop the role of the governing body as a 'critical friend' to the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Monitor performance thoroughly to provide information for more accurate self-evaluation – satisfactory

External support

The work of the local authority and the school improvement partner continues to be valued by the school. Relationships continue to be very good with a constructive partnership in place between the school and local authority to promote the best interests of students. The local authority has also played an important part in strengthening the governing body.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on existing practice to ensure that the monitoring of the school's work is systematic, frequent and robust.
- Improve further the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, including sharing best practice.
- Securing the improvements achieved in students' behaviour.