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Mr Tarun Kapur CBE
Executive Headteacher and National Leader of Education
Parrs Wood High School
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Dear Mr Kapur

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Parrs Wood High School

Following my visit with Angela Milner HMI, Derek Aitken, Peter Bannon and Stephen Wall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 02 and 03 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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.

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

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring inspection of Parris Wood High School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 02 and 03 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, nominated groups of staff, two groups of students, the parent champion, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority (LA). During the visit 43 lessons were observed. Inspectors also visited a number of tutorial sessions.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, four teachers have left the school and five have joined it.

Achievement and standards

Improving students' achievement and attainment continues to be a high priority for the school. Initiatives have been introduced to make sure that the rise in standards identified at the time of the last monitoring visit has been sustained. However, the impact of some initiatives such as broadening the range of courses and qualifications in Key Stage 4, for example in technology-related subjects, will need time to bring about the anticipated improvements in standards and examination results. The use of assessment data to track students' progress and to set demanding targets is in place across the school. Following training in data analysis, middle managers are more competent and confident in using the information to analyse their subject area's relative performance and hold groups of students and teachers more rigorously to account. These improvements are also enabling the school to set accurate and demanding targets and to track progress towards them. Students know their targets and know what they need to do to improve their work.

Close monitoring of students' progress at Key Stage 3 shows that the satisfactory improvement identified at the last monitoring visit is being maintained. Regular tracking of students' progress is enabling the earlier identification of underachievement. Appropriate intervention and support are then provided. The school's data and inspection evidence confirm that most students are making at least satisfactory progress towards their targets in Key Stage 3.

The school's 2009 GCSE results are predicted to continue the improvement seen in 2008. Managers of subjects where performance was relatively weaker at GCSE level in 2008 have produced action plans for raising standards and achievement, although it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness. The late autumn 2008 entry for the Year 11 cohort for GCSE English resulted in 64% of students attaining a grade C or above. The school is confident that results in this subject will exceed the 2008 level

of 68% when targeted groups of students retake the examination following extra support later in the year. The proportion of students attaining a grade C or above in mathematics is also set to rise following the introduction of more focused support for targeted groups of students and support from the LA to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The proportion of Year 11 students attaining the benchmark of at least five grade A* to C passes including English and mathematics is predicted to rise from 51% in 2008 to 65% this year. The data indicates no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls and shows students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making progress at similar rates to their peers.

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 around the school is satisfactory. There is a high level of staff presence at break and lunchtimes. Behaviour in lessons is satisfactory overall but varies widely from the excellent attitudes shown to learning where work is challenging, to poor behaviour where teachers' expectations are too low. However, the new behaviour policy that enables incidents in lessons to be dealt with quickly is effective in avoiding serious disruption. Students state that behaviour is improving. However, the tutorial period too often lacks purpose and contributes little to the personal development of students. Exclusions for the first half of this academic year are similar to those of 2007–08. Given that the school is increasingly less tolerant of unacceptable behaviour, this suggests improving behaviour overall.

Attendance is broadly in line with national figures and similar to the previous school year. It is above target in Year 7, but remains weakest in Year 11. The school makes strenuous efforts to involve the parents of students with poor attendance by inviting them to meetings in school and initiates prosecution procedures in the most serious cases. Support for students with poor attendance has included the signing of attendance contracts by parents and home-school lessons. There is also the facility for some students to access lessons online. The school evaluates the success of its initiatives and has firm plans to widen the scope of the home-school lessons for next year. While there are issues involving late buses in the morning, many students do not show the required commitment to arriving at school on time. The school has put in place procedures to improve punctuality, including trying to contact the parents of each child deemed to be late, but acknowledges that there is still work to do in this area. There is a good range of extra-curricular and support activities on offer in school. Students value these and participation rates are satisfactory taking into account the considerable distances some pupils have to journey home.

Quality of provision

Two thirds of teaching observed was at least good. This represents a satisfactory improvement in the proportion of good or better lessons since the previous monitoring visit. However, the significant proportion of inadequate teaching has remained unchanged. Good lessons contain many strengths. Expectations of students' achievement and behaviour are clear and consistent. Lessons are mostly well planned and challenging. The interactive whiteboard and other resources are used purposefully to engage students in their learning, and activities are generally well matched to the needs of all students. Teachers question students skilfully and build well on their answers, both to deepen and to check their understanding. Students are clear about classroom routines. Teachers and students enjoy a good rapport and students work sensibly with each other to extend their learning. Students in these lessons are responsive to the praise, encouragement and guidance given by their teachers. They display good attitudes and work with interest and enjoyment. The pace of learning is usually brisk but on a few occasions it slips when students who finish a task early have to wait until their classmates catch up. In the best lessons, students respond exceptionally well to demanding teaching and there is a real buzz and enthusiasm for learning.

The key difference between satisfactory and inadequate teaching is the extent to which disruption is contained. In satisfactory lessons, disruption to the flow and pace of lessons is mainly low-level and usually restricted to small groups of students. Work is not fully adapted to the needs of students, expectations are not always clear and students often lack the self-discipline and motivation to work independently. The care and attention they give to the presentation of their work is variable. Nonetheless, there is sufficient direction to the lesson to ensure that most students make adequate progress in their learning. In inadequate lessons, expectations for students' progress and behaviour are weak. The ground rules for acceptable behaviour have not been established. Lessons proceed at a slow pace and students show scant respect either for their teachers or their classmates. There is a wide range of off-task behaviour, including frequent back-chat, too much for focused teaching to take place. School leaders recognise that this low-level disruption sometimes puts a brake on students' progress and have put in place some measures to tackle this and to encourage positive attitudes to learning. These measures, however, are too recent to have had a discernible effect. The school has carried out a large number of lesson observations with a relevant, specific focus. Much effort has been expended on sharing best practice, for example through coaching in how to assess learning. This is one of a number of initiatives which have helped staff at all levels to reflect on their practice and to gain a surer appreciation of the qualities of good teaching and learning. Useful guidance has been shared with middle leaders, which has enabled them to judge the quality of learning in lessons accurately. Leaders at all levels generally have a secure overview of the quality of teaching and learning overall, both with regard to strengths and areas for development. However, students' attitudes and behaviour have not been a specific focus of lesson



observations. References both to this and to the management of students' behaviour by teachers are under-represented in these evaluations. The quality of marking is inconsistent, which reflects the variation in the quality of teaching. Students feel that homework is now more often meaningful and worthwhile.

The school has made good progress in improving the quality of the curriculum. Curriculum provision is constantly reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of all groups of students. Directors of faculty make appropriate use of student tracking data on students to provide an increasing range of subject options that cater for the range of abilities. As a result, the number of subjects and the levels at which they are studied continues to expand. This greater choice has been carefully explained to students and parents through well received taster events, option evenings and the provision of detailed academic guidance on curriculum pathways. A growing partnership with a local college and a range of external agencies are being used to further extend and enhance the existing curriculum and to provide more work-related learning and vocational opportunities.

A more strategic approach to curriculum development is now in place. A number of specific leadership posts have been created to support its development. At Key Stage 3, the amount of time allocated to subjects has been reviewed. Opportunities for students to gain accreditation in the form of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) certificates in the performing arts and e-media have been effectively developed. The primary model of teaching for two groups of students in Year 7 has proved popular with students and parents and led to significant improvements in the achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Similarly, a home-school learning project utilising the school's virtual learning environment has been piloted. This is aimed at a small group of disaffected students and those unable to attend regularly for personal or medical reasons. It has been successful in creating opportunities for these students to maintain learning links with the school and to gain recognised qualifications. Able, gifted and talented students are clearly identified in a range of subjects and the curriculum is increasingly being tailored to provide more effective pace and challenge to match their aspirations and capabilities, particularly in mathematics. Planning for the incorporation of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology in lessons continues to improve as training improves teachers' confidence in the development of key skills within subject teaching.

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 – good

Leadership and management

The inspiring and dynamic leadership of the executive headteacher, much appreciated by students, has strengthened morale and ensured that satisfactory progress in the improvement of this very large school has been maintained. Weaknesses in teaching and in management are being tenaciously tackled. Ably assisted by two deputies, the headteacher's open and robust approach has both challenged and empowered managers. It has also developed their leadership and management skills. Staff receive training for their roles and are then held firmly to account for their work. Most staff have worked hard to take advantage of these opportunities. As a result, the school is continuing to develop an ethos that stresses teamwork, acceptance of responsibility and a shared understanding that the student comes first. Under the headteacher's thoughtful and reflective leadership, the final members of the new senior leadership team have been carefully recruited. Consequently, the capacity of the school to improve is growing. Issues for improvement identified on previous monitoring visits have been carefully considered and most have been satisfactorily responded to. School improvement planning is appropriately focused on the most urgent issues facing the school and it soundly assesses the progress made in dealing with them. Some assessments however, such as that of the quality of the weakest teaching, are at times overgenerous.

Directors of learning have been appointed recently to oversee and coordinate the progress made by students. They have successfully developed a sharper analysis of standards and students' progress by middle managers and have brought about greater professional dialogue between staff on these issues. They provide challenge and innovative ideas for the heads of learning who oversee the progress of students in each year group. Following the simplification of data systems and training in their use, heads of learning are now better informed about individual students' progress and where underachievement lies. Armed with this greater knowledge, they are beginning to introduce initiatives to raise achievement, such as earlier revision classes and earlier mentoring of Year 11 students. They are also starting to liaise more frequently and more effectively with parents and students. Heads of faculty have received training in checking the quality of teaching and learning although there are variations in how effectively and rigorously this is applied to the checking of the quality of students' work.

The first part of a whole-school review of teaching and learning responsibilities has been carried out. Roles and responsibilities, supported by new job descriptions, have been redefined in order to match the needs of the school. This is aimed at bringing greater clarity to individual teachers' roles and at having a beneficial impact on the school's budget. Training for staff has been held in a number of areas, such as the better management of behaviour. The school has rightly sought to ensure that poor and inappropriate behaviour is tackled promptly by teachers in lessons rather than being referred to senior managers. New 'referral' rooms for each faculty have been identified and students whose behaviour falls below what is expected can be transferred to these rooms and supervised. There is scope to reinforce this training more strongly as not all staff have taken on board fully the messages about having



high expectations of students' work and how poor behaviour should be promptly tackled. One of the main contributors for students making inadequate progress during some lessons observed by inspectors is the teacher's poor management of low-level and challenging behaviour. At times the range of strategies being adopted fails to engage students and focuses too heavily on their negative attitude. Teachers with a positive outlook and a firm commitment to the full well-being of students generally provide lessons that are more engaging, enjoyable and focus fully on ensuring the best gains in students' learning.

Training has also been held on making better use of tutorial time. Staff have been asked to introduce a programme of activities to teach students the key elements of good learning. However, the lessons of this training have not been sufficiently well applied in the tutorial sessions observed by inspectors. Too many sessions observed were unsatisfactory as expectations of behaviour were too low, too much disruptive behaviour was tolerated and time was poorly used. The school has recognised that this is an area of its work that it must improve. Training has also been held in the monitoring of teaching for middle managers who have undertaken joint observations with senior colleagues. The school has a generally secure understanding of the quality of teaching although monitoring procedures do not always take sufficient account of behaviour, students' progress and whether teachers' expectations are high enough. An intensive coaching programme for individual staff has been launched with the help of the LA and this is beginning to have some positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

A number of useful amendments have been made to teachers' planners, such as a whole-school lesson planning format and guidance on assessing learning. Good use has been made of consultants to strengthen the performance of the mathematics and technology departments and to provide extra training and challenge for the senior leadership team. The school has appropriate plans to adapt its timetable in order to make learning more effective and is currently consulting parents on this. Appropriate steps have been taken to remedy a health and safety issue identified on previous monitoring visits.

The IEB continues to provide good challenge to the leadership of the school and is generally well informed about school developments. The parent champion is now well established and easily contactable by parents. She acts effectively as a conduit between parents and the school and intercedes on the former's behalf if necessary. Her attendance at meetings of the IEB ensures that parental concerns are heard and discussed. The number of parents contacting the parent champion has reduced since the beginning of the present term, which indicates that direct communication between home and school is now easier and more effective.

The impact of the school's two specialisms on its work remain limited. The department of expressive and performing arts continues to build links with local primary schools and some drama techniques have been used in the training of staff. Technology initiatives remain focused on cross-curricular projects, such as the fashion show project, which involves a number of other departments.

Progress since the last visit on the area 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 is providing good support to the school. A number of consultants are regular visitors and have taken a leading role in the coaching programme for individual staff and in providing training in aspects of teaching, such as assessment methodology. A senior officer visits regularly to monitor and discuss the school's development with key leaders. The LA has provided considerable support from its personnel and legal services during the first part of the school's review of the teaching and learning structure. Consultants from the Greater Manchester Challenge are also providing support for the school. Good links are maintained with two other schools in a nearby local authority. One is a National Support School and there are regular visits by staff to these schools to observe and discuss good practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that high expectations of students' behaviour in classrooms and in tutorial sessions are consistently applied.