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5 March 2009

Ms Anne Quaile
Headteacher
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Handsworth Grange Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
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Dear Ms Quaile

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Handsworth Grange
Community Sports College

Following my visit with Ross Parker, Judith Tolley and Marie Cordey, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 3 and 4 March, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – 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 and Young People's Services for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
H M Inspector



Special measures: monitoring inspection of Handsworth Grange Community Sports College

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work including 42 parts of lessons and seven registration periods. Documents were scrutinised and meetings held with the headteacher, the partner headteacher, other nominated staff, members of the sports council, two members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of staff changes. One assistant headteacher has left the school and a second has stepped down from his role. A partner headteacher, who is also a national leader of education (NLE), is working alongside the headteacher for two days a week to provide additional capacity in the senior leadership team. One assistant headteacher has been appointed to take responsibility for pupil support and a specialist data manager has also been appointed. At the time of the last inspection, a number of governors resigned. The LA withdrew the delegated powers of the governing body and appointed members of a proposed IEB from October 2008 to take responsibility for school governance. In December, the decision to establish the IEB was formally approved by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The chair of the IEB has changed very recently due to personal circumstances.

The school has been affected by significant staff absence in recent months, including the long-term absence of the head of mathematics and other members of this department. Thirteen staff have been referred to occupational health for additional support and counselling.

Achievement and standards

The increased focus on using data to track students' progress, along with a better understanding of what contributes to good learning, means that standards overall are beginning to rise. However, the variable quality of teaching means that students do not achieve as well as they should.

Senior leaders predict that the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five good GCSE passes is likely to match targets and be close to the national average this summer. This is significantly influenced by students' success in vocational courses, some of which are contributing more than one pass grade. The school expects to improve the proportion of students who attain five good passes including English and mathematics. However, current data indicate that standards in mathematics pose a threat to this improvement. This is because the quality of teaching has been inconsistent and as a result, many students have made less progress in mathematics

than in their other subjects. Since January, students known to be underperforming in mathematics have attended intensive support sessions led by external consultants. Most students have begun to make significantly better progress in these sessions. The focus on raising standards and achievement has been centred round students in Year 11, and to a lesser extent, in Year 10. As yet, the school has not been able to systematically tackle weaker progress in Key Stage 3, which contributed strongly to the original decline. Assessment information does indicate that improvements to the provision for Year 7 have resulted in them making better progress than is made in Years 8 and 9. Overall, however, there are still too many lessons where students are not making enough progress. The recent improvements in mathematics in Year 11 are due to substantial input from external consultants and, as such, are not sustainable in the long-term.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve students' achievement – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory. However, low-level disruption in a significant number of lessons reduces the learning of too many students. This occurs particularly where agreed procedures for managing behaviour are not consistently applied or where teaching fails to capture students' interest. Opportunities are also missed to prepare students for learning where registration sessions are insufficiently structured or well organised. Students report that behaviour and attitudes are 'much better' and that they are more involved in school life. Members of the recently formed sports council are especially proud of their contributions to break time activities, fundraising and celebrating the school's sporting successes.

Students' attendance has risen slightly since the last inspection and systems to promote attendance have improved. Parents are more involved and knowledgeable because they receive, and respond to, text messages from school to inform them of their child's absence. Nevertheless, in some lessons poor attendance has an adverse effect on students' learning. Punctuality to lessons is inconsistent and there are too many students who arrive late to classes without a reasonable explanation.

Quality of provision

There is good practice in teaching across the school but it is not consistent enough to ensure that all students make progress at a sufficiently rapid rate to overcome the legacy of underachievement. Although most teaching observed was satisfactory or better, a significant proportion of inadequate teaching remains.

Senior leaders have taken a number of steps to tackle weaknesses in teaching. Systems have been introduced to enable teachers to make a clear link between the

quality of teaching and the progress students make through the more effective use of data in lesson planning. Lesson observations by senior and middle leaders are beginning to establish a more detailed profile of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Judgements made by senior leaders are broadly similar to those of inspectors. However, a whole-school overview of the characteristics of teaching that lead to good progress has not been established; observation records do not always identify precisely enough the steps teachers need to take to improve their practice further.

The most effective lessons are underpinned by high expectations and positive relationships between adults and students. Activities and resources are well matched to students' needs, so that they are engaged, able to succeed and reach short-term goals. In these lessons students respond enthusiastically and rise to the challenge. Students also make good progress and increase in confidence when they are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning and work collaboratively in pairs or small groups to explore ideas for themselves. The effective use of questioning extends students' understanding and both supports and challenges individuals.

All lessons are planned following a common format. However, assessment information is not always used to tailor activities to match the needs of all students so that tasks are often too easy or too difficult. Expectations are sometimes too low. Consequently, the pace of learning slows and progress is hampered. In some lessons, deadlines for completing tasks lack urgency, teacher-led activities last too long, especially at the start of the lesson and opportunities for students to participate fully in their learning are reduced. Many teachers are starting to increase the range of teaching strategies to engage students actively and enable them to take greater responsibility for their learning. However, some students find it difficult to cope with the demands of more independent learning and this slows their progress. Where teaching is inadequate, activities are not structured well enough to ensure that students make the progress that they should. Occasionally, low-level disruption is not managed effectively and this slows the pace of learning.

Much of the school's environment fails to capitalise on students' achievements or to provide attractive, well presented and informative displays. The learning environment in classrooms does not always inspire students. Displays are not always targeted well enough towards students' learning, and assessment criteria are not always visible or easily accessible. In some classrooms, teachers are restricted in the use of new technologies because equipment does not work and whiteboards are too dirty for work to be seen clearly.

New systems to set targets and track students' progress are beginning to take effect. Students have challenging targets for all of their subjects which are based on their performance before they came to the school. Most teachers have a better understanding of how to use data to track students' progress and provide updates into these systems at regular intervals. These updates are shared with both students

and parents. While these new procedures hold considerable promise, inconsistency remains in the extent to which individual staff are confident using the data. Some of the targets are set a long way in advance, and are not always precise enough to offer clear guidance to students about the next steps for learning. The quality of marking is too variable. There is some good practice where teachers identify clearly the level of skill or understanding that students have shown in their work, and offer the next steps needed to reach a higher level. However, errors are sometimes unchecked and, in a few instances, work has not been marked for lengthy periods. In some lessons, students are aware of the assessment criteria and are fully engaged in peer and self-evaluation but this is not consistent across the school.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it ensures that all students make fast enough progress – satisfactory
- Implement the new systems for tracking students' progress and ensure that they result in effective target-setting and academic guidance – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher has responded to the outcomes of the last inspection with determination and energy. She has been supported well by a partner headteacher from a neighbouring school during recent months. She has restructured the senior leadership team and clarified roles and responsibilities in order to meet the school's needs more effectively. Although some senior leaders are relatively inexperienced, they have a sound understanding of what is required to tackle the areas for improvement.

The school improvement plan outlines a sequence of actions to tackle key priorities. Procedures for checking the progress to meet intended outcomes are identified and opportunities are built in to evaluate the impact of actions on improving students' outcomes. However, the plan is lengthy and, in places, is not precise enough in terms of interim measures of progress in the short- and medium-term. Furthermore, it has been extended following reviews undertaken by the LA rather than being revised to tailor existing actions to meet priorities more precisely. The headteacher recognises that a review of the plan and the progress made so far is timely and that actions can be rationalised and prioritised to ensure that the next steps build on what has worked well so far and that recently introduced initiatives are consistently and effectively applied.

Senior leaders have empowered many staff to evaluate students' progress much more effectively, through the use of a sophisticated computer package. This has led to the great majority of teachers taking more responsibility for the progress of their students. It has also enabled senior leaders to begin to analyse where students are doing well, and where they need to make better progress. While some inconsistency

remains in the use of data between subjects, procedures have helped to target strategies to raise achievement more precisely, especially in Year 11.

Lines of accountability have been strengthened between senior and middle leaders in order to build the capacity of middle leaders to take responsibility for key areas of the school's work. Quality assurance procedures have been strengthened and enable senior and middle leaders to establish more effectively the areas of strength or weakness in different subjects. The quality of middle leadership is, however, variable. Some subject leaders are clear about their role of accountability and have responded positively to the demands made of them. However, others do not understand fully the significance of their role in raising standards and achievement. Pastoral leadership has been strengthened and is more closely aligned to improving the quality of learning. Pastoral leaders have also worked effectively to improve communication links with parents.

The new director of the subject specialism is focused and accurate in her action planning and in the need to use specialist status to raise standards across the school. To this end, subject leaders are becoming more involved in planning lessons in which students are more actively involved and interested in their learning. This has already had an impact in some subjects through raising students' confidence and improving their speaking and listening skills. The school has made good use of the specialist subject in spreading good practice in the use of assessment, including in lesson planning, peer- and self-evaluation and in the identification of best practice in lesson structure. However, although this is having a positive effect, it is too early to measure its impact on raising standards and achievement across the school.

The IEB has acted decisively and provided good support and challenge for the headteacher. Following the inspection, the chair of the board recruited members to the board with the necessary expertise to tackle staffing issues and financial management. This has enabled the headteacher to focus on school improvement. The chair has visited the school regularly to evaluate the progress being made and is in the process of ensuring a smooth transition to the new chair of the IEB who has recently been appointed.

Many staff speak positively about the changes that have taken place since the last inspection and the support they have received from lead professionals and external consultants. They recognise the cultural change that is beginning to take place in the school and an emerging ethos that focuses on raising standards and achievement. While there have been a number of valuable steps taken to strengthen the capacity of staff to implement actions identified in the plan, some staff have found it difficult to cope with the pace of change resulting from the intensive activity that has occurred since the last inspection. Progress is being hampered in certain areas as a result of staff absence and this is a potential barrier to improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that the governance and leadership and management at all levels are fully effective – satisfactory

External support

The LA has brokered a range of support for the school which is having a positive impact. For example, the headteacher and partner headteacher have established an effective working relationship to develop a strategic and systematic approach to school improvement. Consequently, the school has been able to make important structural changes to senior leadership and introduce new systems to raise standards more rapidly. The school improvement partner has taken responsibility for monitoring the impact of the headteacher partnership and oversees the reviews undertaken by the LA. Local authority reviews have been used by the school to validate their own evaluation of provision and to guide their next steps to improvement. The original LA statement of action required amendment as it did not contain sufficient clarity in the support to be provided to improve standards in mathematics. Although revisions have not been made to the action plan, the LA has supported the school by funding the work of external consultants to improve the quality of teaching and learning and also in the resolution of outstanding staffing issues. The LA recognises that it would be useful to work alongside the school to review timescales and the nature of support required to ensure that plans for the school's removal from special measures are both timely and realistic.

Priorities for further improvement

- Identify and share teaching strategies that promote good learning outcomes.
- Use data more precisely to tailor plans so that the needs of all students are met.
- Identify short-term targets for students to enable teachers to evaluate whether they are making good enough progress.
- Rationalise plans and prioritise actions in order to embed strategies that have been recently introduced and secure sustainable improvement.