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Mr Keith Hollins
The Acting Executive Headteacher, National Leader of Education
Sandon Business and Enterprise School
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Dear Mr Hollins

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sandon Business and Enterprise School

Following my visit with Mary Davis and Mick Saunders, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 17 and 18 March 2009, 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 October 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.

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 governors and the Director of Children and Young People's Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Sandon Business and Enterprise School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, consultants supporting the school, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Shortly after the previous inspection the local authority seconded a consultant data manager to work alongside senior staff for two days a week. A permanent data manager has now been appointed and took up post from 9 March 2009. The school has also had support from a mathematics consultant since January initially for approximately one day a week and as of the week of the inspection three days a week until the end of the spring term 2009. In January 2009 an executive headteacher who is a National Leader of Education was deployed by the local authority initially full time for six weeks and from then on for two days per week. The headteacher at the time of the inspection remains in post and will retire at the end of the spring term 2009. A new chair of governors took up post two weeks before this visit. The school has become part of the National Challenge since October 2008. During the time of the inspection a deputy headteacher was absent due to illness.

Achievement and standards

The 2008 GCSE examination results highlight that standards are below the national average but show signs of improvement. Although the school regularly assesses students' progress, assessment data has only very recently been collated for Year 11, a year group where a concerted effort is being made to raise standards and improve GCSE examination results. As a result of this recent work, the school has an accurate view of standards and the progress students are making in Year 11. In contrast, senior staff do not know enough about the standards and progress students are making in other year groups and this makes it impossible for the school to make accurate evaluations. During this visit, inspectors noted that the standards students were achieving in English and mathematics lessons were often below, or well below, expectations and their progress, in some of these lessons, inadequate. During this visit inspectors did not look at the impact of cross curricular literacy and numeracy.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas of improvement:

- improve standards of achievement in English and mathematics, and the impact of cross curricular literacy and numeracy through regular checks – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Students' attitudes in lessons were generally positive. Where teaching was exciting and engaging, students' behaviour was seen to be outstanding. However, in some lessons students' behaviour quickly deteriorated where poor teaching failed to provide students with sufficient challenge. In other inadequate or barely satisfactory lessons, teaching failed to raise the aspirations of students and, in response, students were passive and switched off. Behaviour around the school was good. Students were polite, helpful and showed a sense of maturity. A good example of this was the extremely welcoming and helpful way inspectors were greeted on arrival.

Attendance is above the target set by local authority. Good attendance is celebrated. An element of competition between tutor groups has led to students' keenness to improve their attendance. The level of persistent non attendance has shown a significant decrease from 6.2% in September 2008 to 3.9% at the time of the inspection due, in part, to the successful strategies put in place and the effective support provided by the school's welfare and inclusion manager.

Quality of provision

During the monitoring visit inspectors saw some outstanding, several good, and an equal number of satisfactory lessons. There were also a significant number of inadequate lessons, particularly in English and mathematics. At its best, teaching interested and excited students by offering them real challenge, and by showing them clearly how to do well. Relationships were warm and supportive, students enjoyed their learning and appreciated the attention teachers gave them to indicate how to improve their work and rates of progress. A recently agreed format for lesson planning and an emphasis on helping students learn more quickly have led to a sharp focus on the teaching issues arising from the last inspection. As a result, in the majority of lessons, students were clear about what and how they would be learning and had a good grasp of the standards they were achieving. This was not the case across the board however. In inadequate lessons, students were not clear about the purposes of the work they were asked to do, neither about what would count as success. They could not make satisfactory progress in those circumstances because expectations were too low and their potential for achievement therefore went unrealised.

Since January of this year standards of teaching and learning have been energetically monitored. The assistant headteacher overseeing this work has built up a detailed picture of strengths and weaknesses and has clearly identified where support is needed to address shortcomings. There has been a substantial programme of in-service training so that staff have a developing understanding of what counts for high quality teaching and assessment. This has resulted in the school judging that there is a growing proportion of good teaching across the school. A number of heads of department are beginning to take responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching in their subject areas, but this is not happening in English and

mathematics, an impediment to the development of those key areas of the curriculum.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas of improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning through better use of assessment for learning approaches in order that students become independent learners – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Following the previous inspection work got underway, at a reasonable pace, to write a strategic development plan, raising attainment plan and an evaluation of different aspects of the school's provision. These improvement plans were all written in an attempt to fulfil National Challenge guidelines and to outline action to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Although this work began to focus senior leaders on what needed to be done, there was a lack of cohesion between the different plans, further complicated by a local authority plan that also did not fully resonate with the strategic development plan and raising attainment plan. For example, at the time of the previous inspection an area for improvement focused on the use of assessment for learning in order for students to become independent learners. This area of improvement could be seen to be covered by the more generic raising attainment plan development areas, but is in danger of being diluted. Another example is the fact that quantifiable measured targets in the local authority plan have not been reflected in the school's own strategic development plan. The complexity of managing several improvement plans results in a lack of clarity as to what will be used to measure the progress the school is making and how regularly this will be done. Furthermore, as raising standards and achievement in English and mathematics across the school are at the core of what needs to be done and the raising attainment plan only focuses on improving standards at the end of Key Stage 4, the improvement plans appear to lack the preciseness of setting targets for all cohorts at regular intervals.

Since the involvement of the executive National Leader of Education headteacher in January 2009 there has been a significant improvement in the strategic leadership and management of improvement. The senior leadership team have been given clear roles and responsibilities which have raised the bar and ensured there are expectations that can be used to hold them to account. Under the direction of the executive headteacher, the senior leadership team has set up systems to monitor teaching and learning and has begun to build up skills and confidence in using these systems to make evaluations and challenge inadequate practice.

Self-evaluation at middle leadership is underdeveloped. Heads of subject departments have completed a health check, but in most cases this is not based on any substantial monitoring of provision, for example of lessons, teachers' planning and students' work. For example, the head of mathematics has not monitored any lessons. Weak evaluation practice has resulted in the leadership and management of

English and mathematics being ineffective and there has not been enough done to secure improvement.

Governors have been slow to monitor the progress the school is making in order to hold the senior leaders and managers to account. Minutes of the last full governing body suggest there were no formal discussions about the school requiring special measures or what was being done to improve provision. A new chair of governors has taken up the post in the last two weeks and has a clear view of the scale of the challenges the school faces.

Monitoring of teaching and learning has been much more focused since January and this area has been well led by the assistant headteacher. Most of the monitoring has been undertaken by senior staff. At other levels, it less is developed. However, there are signs that things are improving. For example, the head of science has undertaken some lesson observations which has ensured a far more accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. There is now a timetable of a range of monitoring activities. However, despite an increase in activity, records of observations do not focus sufficiently on evaluating the effectiveness of teaching strategies and the progress students make in lessons.

The consultant data manager has provided effective support in setting up assessment recoding systems and also in writing the detailed raising attainment plan. A number of pupils have been identified as needing extra support and challenge and the school has put in place a reasonable range of activities to do this. The impact of these support programmes is being very effectively monitored weekly. Teacher assessments undertaken last November indicated that 33% of pupils were on track to achieve five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, highlighting the challenge the school has in raising standards. Apart from Year 11, there has been no real evaluation of initiatives to improve pupils' progress because assessment data has not been analysed in any way. Furthermore, although the data for Year 11 is being effectively used to identify individual pupil needs, it is not yet being used to identify any patterns and whether any particular group of pupils is underachieving.

At the time of the visit all safeguarding procedures were in place and systems were being followed satisfactorily.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the rigour of self-evaluation at all levels of leadership, governance, to enable the college to monitor its performance more accurately and to inform precise priorities and plans for improvement – inadequate
- improve the monitoring of teaching and learning by middle and senior leaders to ensure rigorous evaluation and feedback to support improvement – satisfactory
- ensure that initiatives to improve students' progress are evaluated thoroughly so that impact can be securely measured – satisfactory.

External support

Following the previous inspection the local authority were successful in deploying a local authority consultant data manager to support the school and secure the agreement for the executive National Leader of Education headteacher to join the school in January. This action to improve the leadership of the school has had significant impact and ensured satisfactory progress. There still remains uncertainty about the long term leadership of the school and the local authority is hopeful that a national advertisement will attract a suitable candidate to take over as headteacher in September 2009. The School Improvement Partner, who also acts as the National Challenge Adviser, provides additional support and has gone some way in attempting to join up the various strands and direction of support given to the school.

Beyond deploying a consultant and arranging a temporary headteacher, the local authority has failed to meet the target times for some of the tasks outlined in its statement of action. For example, governor training should have taken place in January and a review of literacy and numeracy across the school. As the local authority has not been able to keep to its timetable of action it brings into question whether targets, such as those for leadership, capacity and governance, will be met and judged good by June 2009. These targets now appear unrealistic considering these delays in local authority action.