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Mr Jim Cunningham
Acting Headteacher
Humberston Comprehensive School
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Dear Mr Cunningham

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Humberston Comprehensive School

Following my visit with Sara Morrissey HMI, Andy Henderson AI and Tony Pearson AI, to your school on 12-13 May 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 December 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 governors and the Director of Education for North East Lincolnshire LA.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Humberston Comprehensive School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 12-13 May 2009

Evidence

During the monitoring inspection, inspectors scrutinised a range of documents and examined students' work in lessons. 36 part lessons and four tutor periods were observed. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teaching staff, students, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. Informal discussions were also held with students in class and at social times.

Context

Since the school became subject to special measures, the headteacher has resigned and an acting headteacher has been in post since January 2009. A new headteacher has been appointed and takes up their post on the 1 June 2009. An additional deputy headteacher has been appointed from September 2009. Four staff left their posts at Easter 2009, including the head of mathematics and another 10 staff, including some curriculum leaders, will be leaving the school at the end of the summer term.

Achievement and standards

School leaders are using a range of strategies to accelerate progress and raise achievement. The system for tracking students' progress towards challenging targets has been refined and improved, providing a more accurate overview of the performance of different groups of students across the school. Nevertheless, senior leaders are aware that inconsistencies remain in the reliability of some data collected.

Assessment information is now presented in a format that staff find more accessible. Senior and middle leaders are using the information to track and analyse students' progress and take steps to tackle underperformance. Leaders have understandably focused initially on raising the achievement of the current Year 11 students. Targeted strategies have been used to accelerate progress and raise their achievement. A range of well attended GCSE revision sessions held in the school holidays and additional booster classes and workshops has enabled students to improve coursework and close gaps in their prior learning. Based on the current data available, the school predicts that Year 11 students will be closer to meeting challenging targets in a range of subjects including English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) this summer. However, progress in other year groups is more uneven and reflects teaching that does not always take full account of students' prior learning or provide sufficient challenge to extend learning and further raise their achievement.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2008:

- Ensure that all groups of students make at least satisfactory progress – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour around the school is good. Attendance has improved slightly and continues to be above average. Students have a strong sense of respect for each other which means, for example, that they have the confidence to leave bags and equipment unattended during breaks and lunchtimes. Students have a positive friendly approach to visitors and cheerfully appreciate the more challenging atmosphere which now prevails in the school. Students are well motivated, have constructive attitudes to learning and older students also appreciate the way in which the school has provided revision classes. They usually remain compliant in lessons, even when the teaching is mundane, although occasionally the response of a few students in these lessons is challenging. Students understand that diet and exercise are important elements of a healthy lifestyle and this is demonstrated by the fact that a significant proportion of them walk or cycle to school.

Quality of provision

Since the inspection in December 2008, the school has worked hard to introduce a range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching. This has been done with effective support from the local authority and further boosted by the valued input of a number of other external consultants. A teaching and learning group meet regularly, and are committed to supporting improvements. However, their role in identifying and sharing best practice is not well developed. Middle leaders are more regularly engaged in checking on the quality of teaching and learning in their areas, for example, through student book reviews or focused drop in lesson observations.

Despite these efforts, the present picture is one of inconsistency in teaching, learning and classroom practice. Half of the lessons seen during this monitoring visit were good, although none were outstanding. While the proportion of inadequate lessons is reducing, half of the lessons seen were no better than satisfactory. Senior leaders recognise that the quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to narrow the gaps in the performance of different groups of students. However, although they confidently identify strengths and weaknesses in lessons, insufficient emphasis is sometimes placed on the quality of learning taking place.

In lessons where students make good progress, teachers set high expectations, use assessment data successfully to identify the needs of particular students and involve them in a variety of well organised challenging tasks that proceed at a lively pace. Teachers question students well to ensure that they think for themselves, and can explain their understanding. Teaching strategies, including the use of ICT and interactive white boards, are varied and ensure that students take responsibility for their own learning. Learning objectives are revisited regularly in lessons and securely

linked to appropriate success criteria. As a result, students are clear about what it is they are learning and why. An atmosphere of hard work, positive attitudes is sustained by well-targeted praise. Behaviour is good, helped in part by the positive impact and consistent application of the new behaviour management code.

Where learning is less effective, expectations are too low. Activities are mundane and often teacher-dominated. Consequently, students lose interest and enthusiasm and have, at best, a passive attitude to their work. Staff are keen to develop their teaching strategies, but are sometimes too ambitious in the variety of tasks that they plan. As a result, pace is sometimes too frenetic and learning is not well consolidated. The final part of lessons is not used well to help students identify what they have learned and what they need to do next. Marking is variable in its support of learning. At its best, for example in English, it offers both clear guidance for improvement and positive reinforcement for the efforts students make.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2008:

- Embed the use of assessment data into classroom practice to ensure that learning activities meet the needs and interests of all students – satisfactory
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning: eradicate the inadequate practice and develop the satisfactory lessons to good or better – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher, has in a short period of time, won the confidence of the staff and successfully begun to remove some of the barriers to learning which were preventing students achieving as well as they can. He displays a steely determination and has not shirked from making difficult decisions. He provides assertive leadership and ensures that all actions have a clear focus on the improvement agenda. Capacity is being built through some re-deployment of staff and careful appointments. For example, changes have led to the development of a more coherent and proactive approach to the school's provision for students who have particular needs. However, it is too early to accurately assess the impact of this change in provision on the achievement of the students concerned. There is an emerging sense of openness and teamwork amongst staff and governors and morale is improved. Staff readily share and discuss practice and demonstrate a commitment for improvement. Leaders' expectations are understood by staff and those with management responsibilities are held accountable for improvement.

Senior leaders have responded well to the clear direction and expectations of the acting headteacher. Their work is focused on the areas for improvement and they are starting to develop complementary skills to work as a team. Opening up the leadership team to include staff whose main responsibility is connected with pastoral issues is seen as a positive move. Middle leaders feel well supported, are more empowered in their roles and have a clearer understanding of their accountability for

improvement. However, the impact of their work is uneven as staff changes are affecting the leadership of some subject areas. Governors are receiving helpful information and are more confident to ask challenging questions and hold the school to account.

The school is aware of the need to improve standards in their specialist subjects of mathematics and ICT. A soft federation has been established with a local college to address weaknesses in mathematics. An emphasis has been placed on increasing the contribution ICT makes to other subjects.

The school improvement plan outlines a series of actions to tackle key priorities. Procedures for checking progress are identified and regular opportunities are built in to review and evaluate progress to date, for example, through the 'mini Ofsted's' conducted by senior staff. These assess the quality of provision and its impact in different subject areas. Subsequently, curriculum leaders are required to respond to the outcomes of evaluations and produce an action plan indicating how weaknesses will be addressed. Where required, teachers are provided with suitable support and opportunities to improve.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2008:

- Focus leadership and management, at all levels, on improving the outcomes for students – satisfactory

External support

A realistic date for the removal of special measures has been set by the local authority and their statement of action is satisfactory. The original statement of action required amendment as it did not clearly state how far the local authority was aware of problems in the school and what action it was taking prior to inspection. The secondary school effectiveness team are conducting regular monitoring visits. They make a judgement about the progress made by the school since their previous visit. However no judgement, either on how well the school is responding to the key areas for improvement, or of the impact made by the consultants working in the school, is made.

The school improvement partner visits the school regularly. Their reports however lack a clear evaluation of the impact of their work or the progress made by the school. External consultants, some of whose support has been brokered by the school, are providing good support both for individual subject areas and for whole-school issues.

Priorities for further improvement

- No additional priorities were identified.