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Mr K Hollins
The Executive Headteacher
Sandon Business & Enterprise School
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Meir
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Dear Mr Hollins

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sandon Business & Enterprise School

Following my visit with Raye Allison-Smith and Robert Smith to your school on 7 and 8 July 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed to departments other than mathematics.

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 Peoples' Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Sandon Business & Enterprise School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 July 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher designate, members of the senior leadership team, the chair of governors, the School Improvement Partner and representatives from the local authority.

Context

A National Leader in Education from a local federation of two secondary schools continues as the executive headteacher. A new headteacher, currently a headteacher from the federation led by the National Leader in Education, has been appointed to take up the post from September 2009 but has been able to join the college and begin work since the beginning of May. The head of mathematics has resigned. The leadership of mathematics has been undertaken by a mathematics consultant until the end of term. An assistant headteacher from one of the federated schools has been working in the college to lead the work on subject reviews. This arrangement will cease at the end of the term. The college has begun work to assimilate both students and staff from a nearby secondary school that is closing in July 2010. These arrangements are in line with a local authority plan which is protecting staff posts from both schools until 2014. During the time of the visit the executive headteacher was on an educational visit to China.

Achievement and standards

The school has used its assessment information, together with externally validated GCSE modules, to predict that results for Year 11 leavers in 2009 will improve substantially compared to the previous year's results. It is expected that standards will still be below the national average for students attaining 5 A* to C grades, and around the national average for those attaining 5 A* to C including English and mathematics. Results from recent tests for Year 9 students indicate a rise in standards so that English and mathematics attainment is now around the national average, and that in science is significantly above. Assessment of students' progress is now robust across all years, and senior and middle leaders are increasingly using this information to set more challenging targets and to more accurately measure progress.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Personal development and well-being

During the monitoring visit students' behaviour and attitudes to learning were good. In lessons observed students enjoyed learning especially when teachers effectively used praise and engaged students in activities where they took an active role. The college is increasingly providing opportunities for students to express their views on the lessons and the opportunities they are being given.

The college's relentless focus on attendance is having a positive effect and the levels of persistent non attendance are low, although a small number of girls continue to cause concern.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is improving. Teaching in half of the lessons observed was good or better. Inadequate teaching was observed in the mathematics department.

The improvements in teaching and learning reflect not only the dedicated and focused support from senior leaders but also the way staff have embraced the changes. The college's evaluation of teaching is accurate as tested out through joint lesson observations with inspectors and senior leaders. Records show that the college has reached the local authority target of 60% good or outstanding teaching. Although this clearly demonstrates the improvement that has taken place, there remain some areas where teaching is still not ensuring students make adequate progress.

As was found during the previous monitoring visit, relationships between teachers and students were very good. Students enjoyed lessons especially when they were given practical tasks, group work and discussion. Some excellent learning was seen in an English lesson where achievements and the differing needs and abilities of students were taken into account in the teacher's questioning, lesson planning and in the evaluations of the lesson. Students had a detailed picture of their achievements to date and how they could improve their performance. Opportunities to develop their skills for independent learning were well taken and built upon. Not all lessons reflected the same level of insight into the students' potential and prior attainment and too often all students did the same work. A recently introduced lesson plan, which outlines the need to pitch work at different levels, is beginning to ensure teaching is better matched to students' abilities. However, although work is planned at different levels, teachers do not always make explicit to students which level they want them to achieve by the end of the lesson. As a result, students are keen to do their best but do not understand what the teacher expects them to learn.

There is now a wealth of assessment data for teachers to use. It is early days in making sure that assessment directly informs teaching so that students are given work that matches their abilities. For example, individual learning programmes in mathematics, generated from using assessment to identify students not making enough progress, have not yet been proven to be effective.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for 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

The new designate headteacher has already begun to influence the strategic plans for the school joining a senior leadership team who are clearly more confident in their roles of leading, monitoring and evaluating provision.

At the time of the previous visit there was more than one improvement plan which had led to unnecessary complication. The school now has a raising achievement plan which includes actions to tackle key issues identified from the October 2008 inspection. The plan is easy to follow and identifies targets related to standards that the school is working towards. There still remains a school development plan which replicates some of what is in the raising achievement plan and is need of redrafting.

Self-evaluation at middle leadership is improving. Heads of subject departments have written self-evaluation documents evaluating standards, the quality of teaching and teaching and leadership and management. The sections on standards are better informed from assessments and this is improving the accuracy of evaluations. Weaker evaluations focus more on describing provision and not on the impact of provision on student outcomes. More recently, subject department reviews have been introduced which are far more hard edged in their evaluations and judgements and identify clear areas for development. The school has relied on the local authority review of English and mathematics provision and, as yet, has not conducted subject reviews in these departments.

There has been a significant improvement in the collation of assessment data. Systems are now in place to measure the progress students make in English, mathematics and science. For students in Years 10 and 11 assessment data is being collated for all subjects. This wealth of data is now beginning to be analysed in detail, identifying students' progress and highlighting where further action needs to take place. Assessment data identifies weaker progress being made by students with learning difficulties. Work to ensure a strategic overview of support for these students is underdeveloped. For example, analysis of data, monitoring the impact of provision, is not yet driving improvement.

The resignation of the head of mathematics has meant that developments in this subject area have been led by an external mathematics consultant. The mathematics consultant has led training and improved the way assessment data is used to identify the rate of progress students are making. The mathematics consultant has also undertaken a number of lesson observations which have rigorously evaluated the quality of mathematics teaching, finding most satisfactory with a small proportion good and, in contrast, inadequate. The work done to support teachers

has injected a sense of purpose. The input from the mathematics consultant is due to stop just before the end of term, leaving a significant leadership and management task in embedding initiatives and ensuring they impact on standards. A current staff member of the mathematics department has been appointed as head of mathematics, initially for the autumn term, but as yet has had limited experience in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Leadership of the English department is developing. Systems are now in place to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning and the department is much more aware of strengths and weaknesses.

There has been an improvement in the way governors are holding the school to account. The progress the school is making is now being discussed, at length, during governor meetings and it is evident from minutes that leaders and managers are being challenged. Improved assessment data are being presented to governors which allow them to track standards. There still remain areas where governors are rightly seeking more clarity, especially in relation to the budget and the impact on the college of assimilating students and staff from a local secondary school which is closing. It is evident that these arrangements will present deficit budget issues which will only be resolved through an effective recovery plan.

The term of office for the current chair of governors finishes at the end of August 2009, as do a number of other governor positions. The college and local authority are aware that training for new governors will need to take place quickly.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

The local authority has provided satisfactory support since the previous visit. Local authority consultants and advisory staff have worked with heads of subject departments, the coordinator for special educational needs and the governors. Training and advice have been pertinent to the issues the school is tackling. A review of the English and mathematics departments involved lesson observations and a detailed evaluation report on the progress the college is making. In relation to the budget and plans linked to the local secondary school closing there remains much to do in ensuring a close working partnership.

The School Improvement Partner last visited the school in March. No contact with the headteacher designate had been made before this monitoring visit. As a result of the visit in March a brief, but helpful, report was written.

The National Leader of Education, who has been acting as executive headteacher, has pulled back his level of involvement since the headteacher designate has been working in the school which has allowed her to quickly and effectively take the lead.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that leadership and management of the mathematics department leads to improvements in the quality of teaching and the progress students make.
- Use assessment data to inform teaching in lessons.
- Improve the strategic leadership and management of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that action can be taken to improve their learning and progress.