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Mr Tarun Kapur CBE
Executive Headteacher and National Leader of Education
Parrs Wood High School
Wilmslow Road
East Didsbury
Manchester
M20 5PG

Dear Mr Kapur

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Parrs Wood High School

Following my visit with Jim Bennetts, Sarah Drake, Andre Keddle and Keith Worrall, additional inspectors, to your school on 5 and 6 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth 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 be appointed with the agreement of the lead inspector.

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 of Parrs Wood High School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 5 and 6th November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, nominated staff, two groups of students, the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), the parent champion and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed 54 lessons and a number of tutorial sessions in the course of the monitoring visit.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, 24 members of staff have left the school and 22 have joined it. A number of new appointments have been made to middle management posts. The school no longer has a second specialism.

Achievement and standards

The provisional Key Stage 4 results in the summer of 2009 were a disappointment to the school. In English, attainment was maintained at much the same level as in 2008, though this was lower than both the school's estimated grades and challenging targets. While there was improvement in a number of subjects, there was slippage in mathematics and science and in several other subjects for which a substantial number of students were entered. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE level was lower than the school expected. The Year 11 students had prior attainment on entry to the school that was similar to that of the previous year group: a little above average. The attainment of the 2009 Year 11 cohort was broadly average. However, the progress of these students from Year 7 to Year 11 was not as good as it should have been. Nonetheless, the school can demonstrate that, in relation to very weak attainment when these students were in Year 9, they made substantial headway in making up for lost time during Year 10 and Year 11.

Some of those at present in Year 10 completed Key Stage 3 in 2008 and the majority completed it in 2009. The school's data show an improving picture; on some measures, the position is better for English than for mathematics. Overall, the school's data for the present Year 10 suggest that outcomes in Key Stage 3 are similar to targets. In the sixth form, progress has improved and is impressive in several subjects. Overall, the progress made by students in the sixth form is strong.

Steps have been taken to put in place tighter checks on progress towards GCSE in mathematics and there is some effective booster provision in the subject. The current curriculum for Year 10 meets students' needs better, particularly the needs of those of middle or lower ability. However, notwithstanding some promising school

data for Key Stage 3, especially in English, the raising of standards and achievement has not been as strong as the school expected.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 3 and in English and mathematics – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour is improving. It is better in lessons and assemblies than around the school building. In lessons where teaching is stronger and students are well motivated, behaviour is good, and in a few instances, is outstanding. Some low-level disruptive behaviour still exists in lessons where the teaching is less effective and work is poorly matched to students' needs. Students state that the new behaviour policy is more consistent and fairer than the previous system and that combined with the rewards system has had a positive impact. Students feel safe in school. They are well supervised at break and lunchtimes, but there is scope to improve the movement in corridors between lessons. The number of fixed term exclusions has risen in comparison to the same period last year, partly on account of the challenging behaviour of some students new to the school.

Overall attendance for the first half term of the academic year is just below that recorded for the same period last year. The school is now more rigorous in ensuring that students are not removed from its register until confirmation has been received that they are on roll at another school. Attendance remains strongest in Year 7 and weakest in Year 11, although the attendance rate for the latter is higher than it was for the same period for last year's Year 11. Attendance is given a high priority by the school. Students are informed about attendance figures in assemblies and prizes are awarded for classes with the best results. Students who are persistently absent are now monitored more closely and senior staff work with them to improve their attendance. Procedures to improve punctuality, such as the introduction of a complimentary breakfast, are succeeding. Punctuality has improved in every year group and particularly in Years 10 and 11. Changes to the 'student voice' arrangements mean that greater account is now given to the views of learners about the school's development.

Quality of provision

The school has successfully reduced instances of inadequate teaching. This means that in lessons most students make at least satisfactory progress. However, the proportion of teaching that is good or outstanding has reduced to just over half of the lessons seen. This means that the school has not yet succeeded in providing the consistent quality required for students to achieve well over time.

Good relationships are evident in the great majority of classes and most students are willing learners who are generally keen to contribute to lessons and diligent about

keeping on-task. The school's work to ensure that teachers get the 'basics' of lessons in place is bearing fruit. Most now firmly set the expectations of behaviour and attention from the outset. Learning objectives are clearly displayed in almost every class so that students understand the lesson's purpose. Teachers generally make good use of subject specific language and regularly check students' understanding of vocabulary. Students usually make good use of the opportunities for paired work and whole-class discussion which are usually well managed. In many lessons, teaching makes good use of information and communication technology to engage interest, confirm learning points or record new thoughts. More displays in classrooms identify for students the requirements of different National Curriculum levels. Students know what targets they are aiming for, although too many are still not clear enough about what they must do in order to achieve them. Good quality lessons move at a brisk pace with an interesting variety of activities that keep students focused on their learning. The level of questioning provokes students to think hard about what they are learning, with teachers building well on students' answers and encouraging them to use their knowledge to extend their responses. Good learning habits, such as note-taking and referring to prior work in order to underpin the points they are making, encourage students to become independent and active learners.

Lessons are planned to a consistent format which identifies the expected outcomes for 'all', 'most' and 'some' students so that there is now more emphasis on the lesson's purpose than the activities it will include. However, in practice, too much teaching is generalised with all students given the same tasks to complete. This means that, as at the time of the previous visit, although teachers have access to information about students' attainment levels, abilities and special educational needs, activities can provide too little challenge for some and prove too hard for others. Teachers seldom make notes at the end of lessons to pinpoint individuals who have made more or less progress than expected. Such notes could be profitably used to inform the planning of the next lesson. Similarly, while the school is placing a strong focus on developing the assessment skills of teachers, and also of students through peer and self-assessment of some tasks, the quality of marking is too variable. Occasionally, teachers provide concise, constructive and diagnostic comments that indicate helpful strategies for improvement but this is not yet the norm. Consequently, opportunities are missed for students to take on more responsibility for improving their own work. Some teachers fail to establish a calm, purposeful learning atmosphere from the start of the lesson. In these lessons, the pace flags and the learning of all, even those who are willing to work, is too slow. Sometimes, teachers talk for too long so that students become passive learners. On other occasions, even though teachers move suitably round the room during students' individual work, they fail to pick up on mistakes and precious learning time is wasted. Some are too willing to accept untidy or unfinished work or fail to ensure that corrections are completed. While improvements have been made to the overall quality of teaching and, therefore, students' learning, there is still some way to go until it is consistently good enough to ensure that they achieve well.

The school has made good progress in improving the curriculum. There is now a wider choice of vocational opportunities in Key Stage 4, such as BTEC courses in Construction, Physical Education and Business. The e-media courses in Years 9 and 10 respectively have proved popular with students and the school expects the greater range of courses to have a positive impact on future academic results. Nonetheless, the school has rightly identified the need to develop further curriculum opportunities at Key Stage 4. Consequently, there are embryonic but appropriate plans for the introduction of diplomas and qualifications that assess basic skills. The school has developed further its provision for students who are at risk of disaffection. The home-school programme has utilised well links with a City Learning Centre to bring these students back into learning. This programme has been helpfully extended within Key Stage 3 to provide more opportunities for intervention with vulnerable students. Good progress has also been made in developing a whole-school approach for literacy and numeracy. Coordinators for these subjects have strengthened links with other faculties and training has been provided on how literacy and mathematics can be taught in other subjects. Useful training has also taken place on e-learning strategies in the classroom and on meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners. A useful addition to the curriculum has been the 'immersion' or themed days led by the technology faculty which has helped develop students' design and mathematical skills.

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

Under the executive headteacher's strong and determined leadership the restructuring of staffing at this very big school has largely been completed. He has succeeded in maintaining a high level of morale among staff during this period of change. A number of appointments have been made to key management roles, including the leadership of faculties. Their introductory training, led by the executive headteacher, has ensured that these managers share his high expectations for the school. Other new staff have been successfully inducted, including a small number of newly qualified teachers who are being closely monitored and guided by an assistant headteacher. These measures have strengthened the school's capacity to improve. In addition, the executive headteacher has continued to tackle rigorously identified weaknesses in teaching. The school has reacted quickly and robustly to the disappointing Key Stage 4 results. In the wake of these, several new heads of departments have been appointed. An external consultant who has previously worked closely with the school now leads the mathematics department. Another consultant has usefully been employed to provide clear, critical advice on the effectiveness of work and strategies within this department. Since the beginning of

term, additional classes in English and mathematics have been held outside of school time to prepare students in Year 11 for their early entry to examinations in English and mathematics. However, it is too early to judge the success of these changes.

The school's leadership has accepted that, in the past year, assessments of students' progress in a number of subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4 were overgenerous and not scrutinised carefully enough by managers. The school is tackling this as a matter of urgency. Students are now assessed each half term in every subject. Additional time has been allocated to faculties so that staff can meet regularly and discuss more thoroughly students' progress. Heads of learning, who track the progress of year group's are more involved in these discussions. A senior member of the leadership team, including the executive headteacher, has been thoughtfully attached to each faculty. This is to provide advice to staff and a stronger focus on the accuracy of assessments and how they are used to tackle underperformance. The early entry of Year 11 students to some examinations is partly designed to obtain an independent assessment of students' performance. Apt plans exist to use this information to review how students are grouped for learning.

At the previous monitoring visit, the school was asked to focus its monitoring of lessons more closely on the learning outcomes of students. This has begun to happen and since the last monitoring visit, senior leaders have conducted joint observations of lessons with heads of faculty. Learning walks, led by the executive headteacher, have also taken place so that good practice can be pointed out, discussed and explained. Some staff have continued to have the opportunity to visit good practice in teaching within the school and in its partner schools. A 'back to basics' initiative whereby staff are regularly reminded of the key components of good teaching has also been introduced. This has contributed to better behaviour in lessons and tutorial sessions as teachers are now enforcing classroom rules more rigorously. However, these initiatives have not yet had a visible impact in increasing the proportion of good teaching and the school's own evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching remains too generous. The school has begun the process of self-evaluation. Faculties have developed improvement plans that contain evaluations of their departments' effectiveness. A whole-school self-evaluation is, however, at an early stage of development.

Links have been strengthened with parents. A set of useful meetings for parents of new students has been held, led by a new member of staff who oversees transition arrangements. New students spoken to during the visit confirmed that induction procedures were effective. A new approach, called 'parents in partnership' has been introduced to encourage greater parental participation in the school's development. A health and safety issue identified on previous inspections has been addressed through improved fencing which has made the school campus more secure and reduced the access of vehicles. This has also resulted in more recreational space being created for students at break and lunchtimes. The school timetable has been changed so that it runs over one week rather than two. This change has been welcomed by students and staff, although it is too soon to assess its full impact. Nevertheless, the positioning of tutorial sessions at the start of the day has meant



that core teaching time is less effected by the late arrival of students. The use of tutorial time has continued to improve. Staff have worked hard to improve behaviour in these sessions and their content is now helpfully focused on aspects of learning such as target-setting and checking the completion of homework.

The school's technology specialism has begun to play a greater part in the school's development. Following a period of discontinuity, staffing has been stabilised and leadership and management of the specialism restructured to bring about a sharper focus on learning outcomes. An appropriate action plan has been drawn up and the first of several whole-school 'immersion' days held. This contributed aptly to increasing mathematical understanding for Year 11 students.

The IEB continues to support the school, oversee its work through visits to the school and to hold it to account. An example of this is the more detailed reports heads of department are required to produce for meetings of the IEB. The parent champion visits the school regularly, reports findings to the IEB and continues to be a route for parents to contact the school. The school's stronger links with parents and improved communications have meant that the parent champion is now infrequently contacted by concerned parents.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 school continues to be well supported by the local authority. It has provided extensive personnel, legal and consultant support. The local authority has begun to assist specifically with improving the reliability of assessment and in checking the appropriateness of the schools' schemes of work. An officer of the local authority visits the school regularly to check on its progress. The skills of partner schools is also well drawn upon, for example in assisting the checking of students' work and in providing constructive criticism and moderation of the school's judgements on learning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the reliability of information on students' attainment in order to make interventions more effective.
- Increase the match of work in lessons to take account of students' abilities, and ensure that this is identified in planning.