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Mr Brian Sarahan
Headteacher
Humberston Maths and Computing College
Humberston Avenue
Grimsby
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Dear Mr Sarahan

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Humberston Maths and Computing College

Following my visit with Joan McKenna and Jim Bennetts, additional inspectors, to your college on 4 and 5 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the college 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may 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's Services for North East Lincolnshire LA.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Humberston Maths and Computing College

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 4 to 5 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including students' work in books from a range of subjects which were provided by the college and also their work in lessons. Eighteen part lessons were observed. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives from the local authority. Informal discussions were also held with students in class and at social times.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the head of English has retired and the head of mathematics joined the staff on 1 January 2010. Some posts, in art and design, drama and modern foreign languages are being covered by temporary teachers.

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The college has placed most emphasis on improving the attainment and progress of students in Year 11 and there is positive impact of the actions taken. Some students have been entered earlier than previously for GCSE examinations in English and module tests in mathematics have been taken. As a result, more students have either have gained qualifications or modules at grade C or above than last year, or are on target to do so in both subjects. The proportion gaining the highest grades of A and A* has also increased. The proportion of students and of different groups currently on course to meet examination targets in other subjects is, however, varied.

There has been further development of the systems for assessing and tracking students' progress across the college. The resulting information is clearly presented and shows students' attainment at the three formal assessment points undertaken since the last monitoring inspection. The data for Year 11 students is particularly detailed and shows how their attainment relates to their individual targets, this is a positive development. Across the college, the data showed a dip in attainment between the first two assessment points. This was because the initial assessments were judged by senior leaders to be inaccurate and unduly high. Work done to ensure greater accuracy resulted in the second round of assessments being lower, but more reliable. The third round shows an upward trend, indicating improved



progress. There is still some variability across subjects, however. Other differences include evidence of less progress at the highest levels, indicating that more-able students could be doing better and girls are still performing better than boys although the gap is narrowing.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Other relevant student outcomes

Students continue to report that the ethos across the college and the quality of teaching and learning continue to improve. Many students participate actively in lessons, when given the opportunity to do so. A few students demonstrate immature attitudes to learning or a lack of confidence. However, overall the college is regarded as a happy place to work and students generally enjoy their lessons. The monitoring inspection coincided with the first academic mentoring day organised by the college. Parents and carers and staff reported mixed views but generally welcomed the arrangements. Year 11 students enjoyed an off-site day where they participated in workshops and discussions to prepare them for their examination revision. Observation of this event revealed well-motivated, mature young people who appreciated the chance to learn and practise revision techniques in a less formal environment.

The effectiveness of provision

Lesson observations and book scrutiny, in order to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, continue to be a major focus for all leaders. There is an increased emphasis on the effectiveness of learning rather than on the specific features of teaching. As a result, leaders are more adept at identifying improved learning in lessons. Together with appropriate coaching and training for some staff, the overall quality of teaching and learning continues to improve.

Inspection evidence confirmed that more teachers are aware of the data about individual students and are increasingly using it effectively to plan lessons which match their needs appropriately. However, some teachers are not as skilful as others either in planning or in adjusting lessons once they are underway. Successful lessons are pitched with the right level of challenge and pace for most students. However, there are also instances where some groups, especially the more-able, are not challenged as much as they might be. Teachers' skills in questioning students about their learning are variable: sometimes skilful and penetrating, sometimes superficial. In many subjects there is diligent annotation of students' work to encourage them, to indicate their next steps and to record the standard of the work. Students appreciate the care taken with this level of evaluation. They respond by making good effort with their written work and take pride in its presentation.



Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- 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 – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has continued to work vigorously and purposefully on the key issues for improvement and the school continues to move forward. Senior leaders are familiar with their roles and are contributing well not only in holding middle leaders to account for their departments, but also in providing suitable guidance and support to them where needed. Leaders and managers are growing in confidence, some at a faster rate than others. A programme of departmental reviews continues to take place with senior leaders looking at the work of the geography, history and religious education departments during the monitoring inspection. Evidence is regularly gathered by all middle leaders. Classroom practice, work scrutiny and teachers' use of assessment are used especially to evaluate the impact of actions taken on students' outcomes and to inform departmental self-reviews. This work is noticeably strengthening capacity at this level. Likewise, class teachers now have to identify those students who are underperforming and what they intend to do about it. This is a positive development, although the work is at early stages and the quality of the analysis is variable. However, at present, checks focus mainly on improvements in the short-term and leaders acknowledge the need to ensure that improvements, for example, in the use of data and the progress made by students, are sustained. Nevertheless, improvements in the quality of classroom practice and students' academic performance are clear signs that the college continues to move in the right direction.

The school's strategic plan is focused, regularly reviewed indicating clearly the required actions, success criteria and timescales. Through regular focused meetings, the governing body are monitoring and challenging the work of the school well. The school improvement partner has provided helpful training so that they are more confident when discussing progress with different subject leaders.

Suitable focus continues to be placed on developing the contribution of the specialist subjects to college improvement and the wider community. Links are being strengthened with primary feeder schools to ensure a smooth transition between Years 6 and 7.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- focus leadership and management at all levels, on improving the outcomes for students – good



External support

The college continues to strengthen its links with Wakefield City High School. Some senior and middle leaders are in regular contact with their opposite numbers at the school. Leaders report that this link is very beneficial enabling them to share training, ideas and resources. Since the last monitoring inspection, the local authority has reviewed its statement of action. This document identifies the support given by various consultants and is linked to the college's own development plan. The local authority has also undertaken a review of the work of their consultants and the progress being made by the college. However, neither the statement of action nor the review document identifies clearly the precision with which progress made by the college can be monitored and evaluated.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that sufficient challenge is always given in lessons for individual groups of students, but especially for the more-able.
- Build on the current level of detail for monitoring and tracking progress made by students in Year 11, to include that made by students in all other year groups.