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16 June 2010

Mrs Lynne Porter
Headteacher
Sharples School Science Specialist College
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Dear Mrs Porter

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help, which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 June 2010 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please forward my thanks to your Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner and the students for their help during the visit.

As a result of the inspection on 1 – 2 December 2009, the school was asked to

- Raise attainment, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - increasing the proportion of consistently good or better teaching
 - ensuring students know how to improve their work by providing clear written feedback in marking
 - ensuring teachers in all subjects make a good contribution to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Increase the speed at which leaders and managers are addressing underperformance by:
 - ensuring consistently good leadership of all subjects and year groups
 - using data and targets more effectively to drive improvement in student outcomes.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.



Since the last inspection, the headteacher has commenced a restructuring of leadership at a senior and curricular level. Three new appointments have been made at senior team level for September 2010, two of which have been external. From September 2010, assistant headteachers will take responsibility over clusters of subject areas. A restructuring of associate staff is planned to support the school improvement agenda better.

Attainment is improving across the school and in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4. English coursework, already marked and moderated, shows a significant improvement in the achievement of grade C and above on the previous year. November early entry in English for Year 11 resulted in 40% of the cohort achieving a grade C or above, higher than the final profile for 2008/09. In mathematics, results from modules 1 and 3 recorded significant improvements over results in 2009. Regular and systematic tracking of students' progress demonstrates consistent improvement throughout the year. Effectively targeted intervention strategies have had an impact on improving outcomes in both Year 10 and 11. All groups of students, including those formerly underachieving, demonstrate improvement and accelerated progress. Forecasts for 2010, based on rigorous monitoring, for GCSE 5 A* to C indicate a pass rate of over 80% and including English and mathematics of 47%.

Data are more effectively used to promote improvement. The collection and analysis of data have improved at all levels of management. Robust systems have been established to track students' progress and enable the appropriate intervention strategies to promote improvement. There is an evolving use of data by classroom teachers to improve assessment for learning and lesson planning. However, the school recognises that this practice is not yet fully embedded across the curriculum. Middle managers are now more accountable for performance within their areas of responsibility.

School monitoring of teaching and learning indicates that 66% of lessons are judged good or better and 32% judged as satisfactory. This represents a 22% improvement in good or better teaching and a significant reduction in the percentage of satisfactory and inadequate teaching since the last inspection. A new learning policy, introduced at the beginning of the academic year 2009/10, has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and the learning experience. This has been recently augmented by a new lesson monitoring policy which involves a three week cycle of monitoring for each curriculum area comprising data performance analysis, joint lesson observations and joint work scrutiny. Joint observations undertaken during the monitoring visit confirmed the school's accurate assessment of those lessons observed. The school recognises the need to increase further the proportion of outstanding and good teaching in order to increase and sustain improving trends of attainment.

Well focused staff training sessions and a well observed written feedback policy has contributed to the improved quality of teacher feedback. Students cited improved marking as one of the significant changes since the last inspection.



Pass rates at Key Stage 4 in the science specialism continue to be high. The specialism is having a positive influence on raising attainment and increasing the breadth of the school curriculum. For example, the head of specialism has worked closely with the English department on strategies and approaches to drive up standards.

A strong focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills is now in place. For example, one-to-one programmes, targeted group programmes and the renaissance reading initiative are raising literacy standards. Detailed monitoring indicates substantial progress in Year 7, 8 and 9 for a significant percentage of the cohort in improved literacy skills. The school recognises the need to embed the development of literacy and numeracy skills further across all subjects.

The local authority statement of action and action plan have proved fit for purpose with the local authority playing a highly positive role in support and guidance. The reports of the School Improvement Partner are both apposite and informative. The Collaborative Working Group has been thorough, critical and supportive. Governors have played an influential role in supporting school leaders and managers.

Strong and well focused leadership by the headteacher is now driving speedy improvement. Her vision for establishing a culture of sustained improvement and aspiration is ably supported by members of her senior leadership team. Data, tracking, monitoring and intervention systems and accountability at all levels have improved. Self-evaluation is realistic and the school has an accurate view of its evolving strengths as well as those areas requiring further improvement.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector

