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17 September 2010

Mr Eamonn Murphy  
Astley Sports College and Community High School  
Yew Tree Lane  
Dukinfield  
Tameside  
SK16 5BL

Dear Mr Murphy

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Astley Sports College and Community High School

Following my visit with Stephen Wall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 September 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The most important areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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 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 the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Tameside.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in (March 2010)

- Eradicate inadequate teaching through rigorous monitoring and prompt action so that all teaching is at least satisfactory by the start of the autumn term 2010.
- Improve the management of behaviour in lessons by ensuring that:
  - systems for rewarding good behaviour are effective and that all teachers follow agreed procedures for managing behaviour in lessons.
- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that:
  - students' progress improves from satisfactory to good
  - all teachers consistently use assessment information effectively in order to plan learning that meets students' needs and interests.
- Improve the effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively.

## Special measures: monitoring of Astley Sports College and Community High School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 September 2010

### Evidence

Inspectors carried out 29 lesson observations and observed other aspects of the school's work. They also scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, leadership team and other staff, groups of students, the Chair and other members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), including a representative from the local authority.

### Context

Since the inspection in March 2010 seven teaching staff, including one of the deputy headteachers, have left the school. New appointments at the start of the autumn term include a deputy headteacher and two leading teachers in mathematics.

### Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Standards of attainment across the school are steadily rising, continuing the upward trend which was noted at the time of the previous inspection. School data show that the improvement in attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2009 was maintained in 2010 and that, accordingly, students' progress and achievement are also improving rapidly. Unvalidated 2010 GCSE examination results show that the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grades A\* to C rose from last year's 54% to 70%, which is now in line with the national average. The proportion of students attaining five or more grades A\* to C including English and mathematics also rose from 29% to 35% although this remains significantly below the national average. A similar rate of improvement was achieved in students' attainment in science. In addition, the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at A\* to G rose from 91% to over 95%. All students gained at least one GCSE pass. The school's comprehensive tracking procedures and results of modular tests already received show that further significant improvement is within sight for Key Stage 4 results in 2011, particularly in English. Progress in mathematics lags behind that in English to some extent, because the school's strategies to raise attainment are not as fully embedded and some students have gaps in their basic mathematical knowledge and calculation skills.

Inspection evidence confirms that students' rates of progress are improving. In more than half of the lessons observed by inspectors, students were making good or better progress. There were no significant differences between the achievement of students in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, or between different groups of learners. In most lessons, more able students, middle ability groups and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities made similar rates of progress to their peers.

Students are encouraged to think about their learning and apply a range of strategies to help them absorb new information and apply their skills in different situations. Many students make impressive use of information and communication technology (ICT) which contributes to their enjoyment in lessons. For example, a Year 11 BTEC examination group were engrossed in their tasks and demonstrating excellent skills in the gathering and editing of digital images to enhance their coursework and aim for the highest levels. Group work and paired discussions also help to promote students' learning and enjoyment and are common features of many lessons. Most students are comfortable and confident to ask their teachers or support staff if they have not understood something or wish to have further clarification. This was noted in several lessons and makes a good contribution to the effective use of time for learning.

Students comment on the difference improvements to the quality of teaching are making to their learning, enjoyment and achievement. A common view expressed to inspectors was that of an older student who commented 'Lessons are more interesting. Behaviour is getting much better so we can concentrate better in class. Our teachers smile a lot more and that helps us enjoy lessons more.' Some students have regular access to the school's newly-extended PRIDE Centre at times when they need extra help or guidance for a variety of reasons. Those who spoke to the inspector agree that they feel well supported and as a result are happier and less reluctant or anxious about attending school.

The school is improving the quality of teaching and learning through rigorous monitoring and professional development for staff; this is helping students learn more effectively and is driving up their achievement. The school continues to improve and refine its use of assessment data to check on students' progress towards increasingly challenging targets. As a result, students are more aware of what is expected of them and most are clear about what they need to do to achieve their targets. Whole school and individual student targets are increasingly challenging. They set the tone of high yet realistic aspirations for staff and students.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

#### Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour continues to improve as teachers become more consistent in applying the school's code of conduct and its vision of 'high expectations and no excuses.' Occasional pockets of low-level disruptive behaviour are still present where a small minority of students have negative attitudes to learning and is more noticeable in a few Key Stage 3 classes. This is sometimes a factor in lessons where the quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory rather than good or better. When teachers are sufficiently confident and skilled at managing behaviour, students' learning is not adversely affected by the attitudes of a few. For example, in

a Year 9 lesson promoting awareness of different social relationships, the teacher used brief and silent 'waiting times' well to diffuse the potential disruption of one or two less-motivated individuals. This enabled the focus to remain on the thoughtful responses of other students to the question 'How might friendship be put to the test?' prompting answers including 'by differences of opinion.'

The senior leadership team's analysis of behaviour incidents shows that those students who have been excluded for short periods of time are not reoffending and fixed-term exclusions have been significantly reduced. The school is committed to promoting 'student voice' and ensuring that students' views are heard and acted upon, to have a positive impact on their sense of pride. An example of this was the refurbishment of toilet facilities prior to the start of this term, which was appreciated by students.

Attendance has risen by almost 3% in the last academic year to 92.7% and incidences of persistent absenteeism have reduced. The school's strenuous efforts to promote good attendance and punctuality are also paying dividends with fewer students arriving late for school, enabling a brisker start to each day's learning activities.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the management of behaviour in lessons – good

The effectiveness of provision

The quality and impact of teaching on students' learning is improving rapidly. Inadequate practice is not tolerated and underperformance is challenged. Regular and rigorous monitoring of lessons leads to the identification of professional development needs, the provision of targeted programmes of support and sharing of good practice. The proportion of good and outstanding teaching is rising significantly as a result, although a significant amount of satisfactory teaching remains. Improvements to teaching are seen in: the quality of lesson preparation; the level of challenge presented to students of differing needs and abilities; and in the swift pace and variety of activity to keep students motivated and focused on learning. Teachers ensure that students know what to do and what is expected of them, so that students demonstrate more independence and self-motivation. Teachers are improving the effectiveness of their use of ICT, particularly interactive whiteboard technology, to add extra stimulus to learning. Regular checks on progress during lessons ensure that teachers test students' understanding and provide support where students experience difficulties. Improvement is seen most clearly in higher levels of challenge which encourage students to think deeply and justify their responses. Where teaching is satisfactory, learning objectives are less clear and teachers try to cram too much into the allocated time with the result that some students become frustrated and respond, occasionally with inappropriate behaviour. The school is continually checking and refining its systems and procedures for

tracking student progress. Professional development has improved teachers' understanding of the importance of using assessment data to check on students' progress towards demanding targets. However, teachers are not consistent in using available data effectively in lessons to match tasks closely enough to students of all abilities.

The school continues to improve its curriculum by adding to the range of courses and qualifications in Key Stage 4. This has been largely responsible for the increasing proportion of students achieving examination success over the last two years. Students say they are pleased with the range of options available to them.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching through rigorous monitoring and prompt action so that all teaching is at least satisfactory by the start of the Autumn Term 2010 – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and leadership team appreciate being able to work with and seek advice from other professionals with successful experience of managing change. They are making good use of these opportunities to develop further their skills and capacity to secure rapid improvement. Concerted actions to improve teaching and ensure accountability, noted during the March 2010 inspection, have started to take effect. This has resulted in a culture change in the school that is reflected in the clear commitment of staff to work with each other to improve their skills and 'raise their game' for the benefit of students' learning.

Leaders are aware that the sports specialism does not yet have a clear and positive impact on achievement across the school, and the quality of teaching in physical education is inconsistent. Several initiatives such as the appointment of a new director of specialism have been introduced to bring about the necessary improvement but it is too early for their impact to be felt.

The IEB was formed in August 2010 and held its first full meeting during the time of this inspection visit. However, some members have already spent time in the school during the summer term, meeting with the leadership team and receiving reports on progress. The IEB includes experienced and knowledgeable governors with a proven track record in other schools, and is well placed to act quickly and decisively in challenging and supporting the school. Plans are in place for the recruitment of further IEB members and for the development of a shadow governing body. Training needs and key roles and responsibilities for IEB members have already been discussed and a draft plan agreed.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and

supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively –  
satisfactory

### External support

The school has been receiving consistent support from the local authority since early in 2008 when it was first identified as a school causing concern. Following the last inspection, the local authority quickly initiated the processes required to disband the previous governing body and form an IEB. The authority's statement of action appropriately addresses the school's key issues for improvement, the resources required and success criteria by which the effectiveness of its intervention and support can be measured. Although the proposed timescale of April 2011 for removal from special measures may be overoptimistic, it reflects the local authority's confidence in the capacity of the leadership team to bring about improvement.

The school is making good use of the range of additional support provided by the local authority and through funding from the Greater Manchester Challenge. The partnership with an outstanding school in which the headteacher is a National Leader in Education continues to enhance the development of senior and middle leaders' skills and provide opportunities to share good practice.