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Mr Alan Smithies
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smithies

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Parklands High School

Following my visit with Derek Aitken and Peter Bannon, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 10 and 11 February 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 April 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – **inadequate**.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – **satisfactory**.

Newly qualified teachers **may not be appointed**.

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 Liverpool City Council.

Yours sincerely

M McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Parklands High School.

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 February 2009.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and students' work and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, two groups of students, representatives of the local authority and a member of the interim executive board (IEB). A telephone discussion was held with the school's National Challenge Advisor.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, one teacher has left the school. An IEB has been established in place of the governing body. The school has also been designated as a National Challenge school.

Achievement and standards

The school has made satisfactory progress in improving standards in English and mathematics and at Key Stage 4. Since the previous monitoring visit, the mathematics department has received support from the local authority in order to improve the management of behaviour in lessons. In the mathematics lessons that were observed, students behaved well and were keen to learn. The progress made by students in these lessons, including those in Year 11, was at least satisfactory. The English department has recently focused on motivating boys to write through the 'writing for real men' initiative. This seeks to improve boys' enjoyment of writing, partly by enlisting support from their fathers. In 2008, the proportion of Year 11 students attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE level was 15%, which was a strong improvement on the very low results of 2007. The school's tracking data, which are updated every two weeks, suggest that results will continue to rise to over 24% which is 3% above the challenging target set to be in the top quarter of similar schools. School assessment data indicate that some 27% of students are expected to gain A* to C grades in English. A similar picture exists in mathematics. Fifteen per cent of students have already obtained a grade C at GCSE level in English and will be seeking to improve this grade later in the academic year. Students who are underachieving in English, receive extra lessons in this subject with time taken from personal, social, health and citizenship education. The school continues to provide mentoring to students in Year 11 who are not achieving as well as they should.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve achievement in English, mathematics and at Key Stage 4 - **satisfactory.**

Personal development and well-being

Students' attendance has improved. In the academic year 2007/08, it was 88.5%. In the autumn term of the current academic year it rose to 92.2%. The school's actions to improve attendance are bearing fruit. Students understand and respond well to the system of rewards and sanctions for attendance and appreciate the benefits of coming to school regularly. The school is prepared to take parents to court if their children are persistent absentees. The number of persistent absentees has been reduced from 101 in 2007/08 to the current figure of 36. The appointment of a full-time attendance officer, and the work of managers in each year group with responsibility for attendance, has strengthened the school's capacity to improve attendance. These staff telephone and text a student's home on the first day of absence. The attendance officer follows up this work until the reason for absence is known. Students are well aware of the sanctions for lateness but there is clear room for improvement. Despite the use of punctuality agreements, some thirty students arrived late for school on the morning of the second day of the visit.

Students' behaviour is satisfactory in lessons and around school. Referrals of students to senior staff for unacceptable behaviour in lessons in the autumn term of the current academic year have been reduced to one seventh of what they were for the same period in the previous year. Students usually listen satisfactorily to their teachers. Attitudes of students to learning vary from showing high levels of interest and enthusiasm for their work to being easily distracted and involved in low level disruption. Students enjoy being actively involved in their learning and more imaginative teaching is encouraging them to do so.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve attendance – **satisfactory**.

Quality of provision

During the inspection 24 lessons were observed. One was outstanding, 11 were good, 10 were satisfactory and two were inadequate. This represents a satisfactory improvement in the proportion of good or better lessons since the previous visit, when only one third of the lessons was judged to be good.

The improvements in teachers' planning of lessons and the sharing of lesson objectives, noted at the previous visit, have been maintained. A further notable improvement has been in the use of the interactive whiteboard and other technologies. The interactive whiteboard is often used well as a visual reminder to students of lesson objectives and to illustrate new information. This use of the whiteboard is usually successful in capturing and sustaining students' attention and concentration. Sometimes students get the opportunity to use these technologies



and this boosts their confidence and engagement in their learning. Questioning is often used skilfully by teachers to probe and clarify students' thinking. Strong expectations of students' behaviour and high levels of their active participation are also to the fore in good lessons. Both of these factors contribute well to students' enjoyment of learning. The feature which most distinguishes these successful lessons from weaker ones is the sharp focus on timed, chunked steps in students' learning and the provision of interesting activities. This focus enables students both to make, and, importantly, to recognise progress towards short-term goals, measured against explicit assessment criteria. Students respond well to these clear, achievable expectations for their learning. When challenged, they rise to the occasion, evaluate securely their own progress and that of their classmates and are left in little doubt what they need to do to move to the next level. Students' recognition of the progress they have made helps to maintain their interest and enthusiasm. Sometimes, however, there is evidence in lesson plans of a confused understanding of how lesson objectives and activities differ from outcomes and success criteria. This blurs expectations both for teachers and for students of the progress learners should be making. On these occasions, resources are less well matched to students' abilities and some key terms are not explained or checked to ensure that students have fully understood them. Students are left too much in the dark of what is expected of them and without this clear framework they lose focus quickly and make infrequent attempts to listen and to learn from each other. Behaviour tends to slip, which, while not openly disruptive, disturbs the flow and pace of the lesson. On these occasions, lesson endings add little value to students' learning. Weaker practice is also reflected in, for example, the seating of students, which does not always promote good listening skills, and some variability both in marking and the setting and completion of homework.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that a higher proportion of lessons are good or better - **satisfactory**.

Leadership and management

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has put in place procedures to improve systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning. A check on the quality of teachers' planning has been carried out as has a detailed scrutiny of students' work. The latter has indicated a number of weaknesses in teaching, most notably in marking. Senior managers have met with individual staff to address these shortcomings and a further scrutiny of work is planned. The monitoring and evaluating policy has been revised although currently it is shared only amongst middle and senior leaders. Extensive and regular monitoring of lessons has been undertaken by senior leaders, ably assisted by an associate headteacher. Monitoring is now an established feature of school life and some visits to classrooms take place unannounced. Documentation for this process has been redesigned to focus the

attention of observers on the achievements made by students in lessons. The resulting evaluations of lessons are increasingly accurate, although some do not assess sufficiently well the amount of progress students make in their learning by the end of a lesson. Nevertheless, the school now has a broadly accurate picture of the overall strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning. This information has been well used to develop an assessment of the effectiveness of each subject department. Middle leaders have also received training in monitoring. They are beginning to observe work in their department and are forming a clearer picture of its effectiveness. This initiative is strengthening the school's capacity to improve and there are appropriate plans to develop additional guidance on monitoring.

The school's more accurate understanding of the strength of teaching and learning has allowed it to identify, and then concentrate on improving, satisfactory and inadequate provision. A number of weaknesses in teaching have been tackled. Support and guidance has been provided for a number of staff by mentors and consultants and through additional monitoring. Consultants, mostly from the local authority, are well used to work alongside the core departments. An example is their intensive work with the mathematics department which has brought about discernable improvements in teaching and learning in the subject. These measures have contributed to the increase in the proportion of good teaching.

As well as maintaining the morale of staff, the school's leadership has promoted an increased amount of professional dialogue amongst staff about what constitutes good teaching and learning. The recent re-designation of heads of year as 'progress leaders' has sharpened the school's focus on the achievement of students. Data is more strongly used by these managers to track achievement. Progress leaders now submit half-termly reports to the headteacher although there is room to add assessments of the progress students are making. Heads of departments have been issued with new guidelines aimed at ensuring greater discussion about teaching and achievement at staff meetings. They complete reports on their subject which cover issues such as students achieving well and those causing concern. These reports could usefully include more analytical detail on students' progress in the subject.

At the last monitoring visit the school was given an additional priority of increasing opportunities for all staff and managers to develop a clearer understanding of what constitutes good teaching. Progress on this issue has been satisfactory. The teaching and learning policy has been reviewed and a helpful section added on what good teaching looks like. Training has been held in conjunction with the local authority on the use of data and on the principles of good teaching, with an emphasis on using clear learning objectives. Ten staff have visited other schools to observe good practice and have reported their findings to their department and senior managers. There is scope to share what has been learned more widely amongst staff. Existing good practice in teaching within the school has been videoed and disseminated. Some useful documentation has also been drawn up to remind staff of the key tenets of good teaching. This includes a handbook which advises on such issues as different learning styles and how to ensure successful plenary sessions. A series of workshops has been held by the local authority on a range of different features of



good teaching. The school is building on this by assigning middle managers to act as points of reference for staff on aspects of teaching such as marking. This initiative is in its early stages. Although a number of weaknesses in pedagogy remain to be tackled, such as ensuring that work in lessons is better matched to the different needs of students and evaluating the success of lessons, the awareness of staff of what makes for good teaching has grown.

The senior leadership team has kept the governing body informed about its progress in tackling the areas identified for improvement through regular written reports. There is scope to sharpen these evaluations, for example, by providing more concise information about the proportion of good teaching. An IEB has replaced the governing body and a number of its members have backgrounds in education. However, it is too early to judge its impact on improving the school. Since being designated a National Challenge school, the school's improvement plans have been incorporated well into a new and high-quality raising attainment plan. The school is aware of the distance it still has to travel and that it must maintain and increase the momentum of improvement to ensure that recent gains in teaching and students' achievement are secured and built upon.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Develop more robust quality assurance systems to enable the effective monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching and learning – **satisfactory**.

External support

The local authority has provided good support to school. It has led training on a variety of aspects of good teaching. A number of its consultants in the core subjects visit the school frequently to work alongside departments and individual staff to develop teaching and assessment procedures. The local authority has conducted a major review of the work of the school in teaching, learning and leadership and provided training in monitoring to both senior and middle managers. It has also arranged visits to other schools in order for teachers to observe good practice in teaching and has facilitated an agreement to establish links with a high attaining school. The school has received good support from its National Challenge Advisor who has worked closely with school leadership to draw up its succinct raising attainment plan. An associate headteacher assists with the development of the school's monitoring processes.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers plan appropriately for students' differing abilities and reflect and evaluate on the progress made by students in lessons.