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7 December 2009

Mr A Smithies  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Smithies

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Parklands High School**

Following my visit with Ann Wallis and Pankaj Gulab, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 3 and 4 December 2009 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 fourth 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 – **satisfactory**

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – **satisfactory**

Newly Qualified Teachers may only be appointed with the agreement of the lead inspector.

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 Liverpool City Council.

Yours sincerely  
Michael McIlroy  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## **Special measures: monitoring of Parklands High School**

### **Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 December 2009**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work including 26 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with nominated staff, two groups of students and the school's National Challenge adviser. Telephone conversations were held with a representative of the local authority, the headteacher of a partner school and the Chair of the Governing Body.

#### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring visit five members of staff have left the school and one has joined it. The Interim Executive Board (IEB) has been replaced by a new governing body. The school has become a National Challenge Trust School.

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

The most recent results of GCSE examinations show that the school has made good progress in raising standards at the end of Key Stage 4. The percentage of students securing 5 or more A\* to C grades rose to 53%, an improvement of 15% on the previous year. The proportion of students who secured 5 or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics rose by 6% to 21%. This was largely as a result of improvements in English, where 35% of students achieved A\* to C grades and which was an increase of 15% on last year's results. Results in mathematics, however, dipped in comparison to the previous year and lag behind English results by five per cent. Intervention strategies to improve students' performance in Key Stage 4 continue to have a positive impact on students' attitudes and the progress they are making. Tracking data provided by the school suggests that significantly more students will secure A\* to C grades by the end of the academic year. A sizeable number of students has been entered for early examinations in English and mathematics. This is also the case in science, where over two-thirds of students in Year 11 have already attained 2 good GCSEs in the subject. This strategy of early entry is being used successfully to encourage students by showing them what they can achieve. It is also helping the school work towards its goal of ensuring that all students leave the school with a qualification. The school has sought to make vocational courses more relevant and accessible to students who are at risk of becoming disaffected with education and students' rising attendance suggests that this approach is having some impact.

Progress in raising attainment has also been made at Key Stage 3, although this is not as strong as that achieved at Key Stage 4. Results rose modestly in mathematics and science, but a stronger improvement was recorded in English where the proportion of students gaining Level 5 or above rose by 8%. The school remains



keenly aware that it must continue to work hard to meet the National Challenge's target of ensuring that 30% of Year 11 students achieve 5 or more A\*-C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE level.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve achievement in English, mathematics and at Key Stage 4 - good

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Students' attendance has continued to rise since the start of the academic year and now stands at 92.28%. Students spoke of how improvements to lessons have added to their enjoyment of school. This, in turn, has made them more willing to attend. Robust steps have been taken to reduce the absence of students whose attendance falls below 80%. Much of this is caused by taking holidays during term time. Improvements recorded last year in reducing persistent absence have been sustained and school data suggest that this will reduce further. The school uses a wide range of strategies, including telephoning or texting parents on the first day of a student's absence. Where necessary, it issues fixed-term penalty notices. Meetings with external agencies about students' welfare usefully include a discussion about how attendance can be improved. The school has begun to focus on students whose attendance falls below 90% and this is contributing positively to the improved overall level of attendance. The punctuality of students between lessons is satisfactory. However, punctuality at the start of the school day remains a concern. The school's data indicates that on average six per cent of students arrive late each day for school. However, on the second day of the monitoring visit approximately 10% of students arrived late, half of whom were students in Year 11.

Behaviour in lessons observed during the visit was satisfactory overall. In some classes, there is low level disruption and inattention. In some cases, this is because too many students are not fully prepared for the start of lessons, for example, by not having pens or pencils with which to write. Students' understanding of healthy lifestyles is developing although a few were observed consuming fizzy drinks in the school building prior to the start of the school day.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve attendance – good

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The school has made satisfactory progress since the last monitoring visit in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The quality of teaching is broadly similar to that seen at the last monitoring visit, although no outstanding teaching was seen on this inspection. Some weaker teaching has been eradicated, although a small amount of barely satisfactory and inadequate teaching remains. The local



authority, National Challenge advisor and specialist consultants have all provided valuable support and training for teachers. Consequently, staff continue to have good opportunities to improve their teaching skills. Evidence of the impact of these training sessions can be seen in lessons in the way in which teachers use paired and group work to involve the whole class and when they check learning mid-way through the lesson. Lesson planning is consistent and most staff clearly appreciate the basic elements of a good lesson and the teaching techniques that promote learning. However, this repertoire of techniques has yet to be fully understood by all staff or refined and adapted to suit the needs of individual subjects.

Where teaching was good, learning objectives were shared with students, activities were varied and interesting, good use was made of information and communications technology (ICT) and work was well matched to students' needs. Students in Years 7 and 8 gain real benefits from the Learning at Parklands (LAP) course where they grow in confidence, develop good team working and communication skills, and share ideas and information sensibly. In many lessons, teachers use perceptive questions which extend students' knowledge and understanding well. Most teachers manage their classes well. Teachers and teaching assistants are particularly adept at ensuring that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with complex social and emotional needs, are fully engaged in learning. However, there are lessons where the pace is not brisk enough and in some lessons teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of students. Teachers talk for too long before allowing students to learn independently. Consequently, some students lose interest, drift off task and the pace of learning slows. Opportunities are also missed in tutorial sessions to reinforce the schools' expectations and to ensure that all students are fully prepared for learning. Teachers increasingly encourage students to assess their own and each others' work. In some lessons, this works well, and as a result, students are very clear about how well they are doing and how to improve. In other lessons, they are less clear about the next steps to take in their learning and teachers' marking of work is sometimes not sufficiently helpful in giving pointers for improvement. A teaching and learning forum has been set up for staff to share good practice and there are increased links with a partner school. Both of these initiatives are helping to sustain improvements in the quality of lessons.

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

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The headteacher and senior leadership team have satisfactorily maintained the school's drive for improvement, particularly in the areas of improving standards at Key Stage 4 and improving attendance. Morale amongst staff remains high. A number of staff, appointed to temporary posts on the senior leadership team, are continuing to grow into their roles. A newly qualified teacher has been successfully inducted and is well supported by both the school and the local authority. A number of previously identified weaknesses in teaching have been addressed. Support plans



for staff whose teaching is graded satisfactory or weaker by the school are in place and these staff have some opportunities to visit other settings. A new school improvement plan has been drawn up with the assistance of a consultant and members of the Parklands Trust. The plan reflects the themes for the school identified by the new trust. One theme focuses sharply on raising attainment and improving the quality of teaching, and fittingly incorporates the priorities of the National Challenge initiative. The school has developed its self-evaluation procedures satisfactorily. An overall self-evaluation has been written, but the school recognises that this process needs to be much more rigorous and evaluative and involve the governing body more.

Since the last visit the school has focused on developing the roles of middle managers. Having undergone training in the monitoring of teaching and learning with officers of the LA and an external consultant, they have begun to assume a greater role in checking on the school's work. They carry out 'learning walks' to lessons and give staff feedback on their findings, although some of this is informal. They have begun to observe teaching and to provide written and oral feedback to staff who are monitored. There is scope for senior managers to ensure that this feedback is more tightly focused on issues which prevent students from making faster progress. These observations contribute to the school's overall view of teaching and learning, which is overgenerous. Heads of departments share responsibility with senior leaders for ensuring that arrangements to cover the absence of staff are robust. However, this approach is not consistently effective. There is scope for the school to strengthen and vary its monitoring procedures in order to ensure that staff absences are properly planned for and resourced.

Middle leaders have written summary evaluations of their departments' effectiveness. These would benefit from being more analytical and evaluative about the progress made by students and about the issues that bring about, or act as barriers to, its improvement. Middle leaders have also drawn up departmental improvement plans. The school has rightly identified that actions proposed in these need to be more closely linked to the findings of departmental evaluations. There is also scope for these plans to include clearly defined milestones by which progress towards academic targets can be measured, more precise timescales and a clearer indication of which staff have responsibility for proposed actions. A scrutiny of work has also been undertaken by senior leaders and written feedback given to departments, but this has yet to eliminate fully some weaknesses evident in students' work, such as poor presentation.

The lesson planning format has been changed to allow teachers to reflect more on the effectiveness of teaching. Inspection evidence shows that this is taking place. Training has also been held with the school's lead educational partner for English and mathematics staff, although this is more developed in the case of the latter. Staff from these departments have observed good practice in the partner school. Whole-school training sessions have been held on assessment, effective questioning



cooperative learning and on the components of a good lesson. Having expanded the range of teaching strategies and styles that staff can choose from, there is room for the school to check more closely that the most effective strategies are consistently applied in lessons, so that more teaching is consistently good or better. There is also room to extend monitoring arrangements to check that tutorial times are used more effectively to reinforce expectations of behaviour and that students are fully prepared for lessons. A new system for analysing the performance of students is being introduced. This is making the tracking of students' progress more accurate. It is used by the new intervention manager to identify underachievement, plan how it can be tackled and to record the success of support students have received.

The IEB has been replaced by a trust and a governing body. Continuity has been maintained as three members of the IEB have joined the trust. Parent governors have recently been recruited to bring the governing body up to full strength. Whilst it is too early to judge the full impact of the new governing body, it has made a promising start to its work. Relevant committees have been established and several governors have been appointed to key areas of responsibility. The governing body is already beginning to hold the school to account for its work. For example, performance management arrangements for the headteacher have been put in place. Appropriate steps have been taken to appoint a new headteacher and to plan for a smooth transition of responsibility. Some steps have been taken to develop relationships with parents and students. A well-attended open day has been held for parents of prospective students. A new prefect system has been introduced which aims to give some older students greater opportunities to exercise responsibility.

Progress since the last visit on the areas 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 is appropriately reducing its good support to the school so that it can develop its own capacity to improve. It has supported and provided training for a newly qualified teacher and advised the new governing body on governance. A team of local authority officers has carried out a review of the school's provision and senior officers regularly monitor the school's progress. The school's lead educational partner has worked well with it. In addition to facilitating liaison activities between a number of departments, it has organised joint enterprise days for students, shared good practice in teaching and supported a new teacher. The National Challenge adviser visits the school regularly and provides incisive reports on the school's progress. A number of staff have visited other settings to observe good practice.

### **Priorities for further improvement**



- Maximise the use of tutorial sessions to strengthen and reinforce expectations of learning and behaviour and to ensure that students are well prepared for learning.