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1 October 2009

Mr Richard Pickard  
Headteacher  
Kirkley Community High School  
Kirkley Run  
Lowestoft  
Suffolk  
NR33 0UQ

Dear Mr Pickard,

**Special measures: monitoring inspection of Kirkley Community High School**

Following my visit with Heather Housden and Graham Sims, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29-30 September 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

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

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed without the permission of HMI.

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 Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

**Mark Phillips**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Special measures: monitoring of Kirkley Community High School**

### **Report from the first monitoring inspection on 29-30 September 2009**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed 27 lessons, a form tutorial and an assembly; they scrutinised documents including the 2009 GCSE results, exclusion records, school action plans and departmental self-evaluations. They met with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the National Challenge Adviser, senior advisers from the Local Authority, members of the Senior Leadership Team, middle managers, and the School Council. HMI met regularly with the headteacher throughout the inspection, and the headteacher observed the final team meeting where inspection judgements were made.

The effectiveness of the sixth form was not considered in detail during this inspection, as it was judged to be satisfactory at the time of the inspection in March 2009. However, this may be a focus on future monitoring visits.

#### **Context**

Since the school became subject to Special Measures, there have been some significant changes to the school's management structures. In June 2009, the Secretary of State gave consent for the Governing Body to be replaced with an Interim Executive Board. The local authority appointed five experienced board members, and a Chair was elected from 1 September. Twenty-eight members of staff left the school at the end of the summer term. A smaller number of new staff joined the school in September, including five newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) who were appointed before the March 2009 inspection. In September 2009, three assistant headteachers returned from maternity leave and this has increased the size of the senior management team significantly. A new head of science and a new head of mathematics also took up their posts at the start of this term.

The school remains subject to proposals for the reorganisation of education in Lowestoft, with the age range changing from 13-18 to 11-16 in September 2011.

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

In the 2009 examinations, the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes including English and maths was higher than in 2008. However, overall standards remained low and the school did not meet any of its targets. All groups of students underachieved. This underachievement was confirmed by the poor progress seen in a significant proportion of lessons during the inspection. While the school's tracking systems are more robust and this is helping the school to face up to this underachievement with a much greater sense of realism, the same data is not used

effectively by teachers to plan lessons that meet individual students' needs. Because these needs are not being met, and because many lessons do not challenge them to reach higher standards, students' enjoyment is limited and many continue to show negative attitudes towards learning.

### **Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:**

- Improve the progress that all groups of pupils make, and the standards they reach, by: implementing further the school's tracking process, identifying where underachievement lies, intervening to counter it and eliminating its causes – *inadequate*.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Despite the fact that a significant number of lessons lack challenge and excitement, many students are tolerant and comply with the school's expectations for good conduct. Staff, students, and local authority all report that behaviour in the school has improved. Nevertheless, the number of temporary exclusions over the past year is extraordinarily high. Many of these exclusions have been for verbal abuse and there have been instances of bullying and racist behaviour which, although dealt with swiftly, have not been logged and reported as they should. It is imperative that the school implements systems to monitor patterns of behaviour, to identify groups of students that are at risk, and to identify links between poor behaviour, poor teaching, and poor learning.

Underachievement in English and mathematics, weak provision for information technology, and insufficient opportunities for students to develop independent and collaborative working skills in lessons all mean that students remain poorly prepared for their future studies or working lives.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Inspectors saw some examples of particularly good teaching and learning. In an art lesson, for example, students were working independently to develop their understanding of shape and form. They did this through careful application of drawing and shading skills that had been built up systematically by well-directed teaching. Students showed great care and pride with their work, and consequently made good progress to achieve above average standards. However, lessons of this quality are the exception. The school is not on course to achieve its target of all teaching being satisfactory or better by November 2009. A third of all lessons seen by inspectors were judged inadequate. Common features of these lessons include insufficient support for students with particular learning needs, such as those in the early stages of learning English, or work that does not challenge or interest more able students. Meaningful homework is set too infrequently. While there is some good practice, much marking is poor or not done at all. In some lessons where the

teaching seen by inspectors was satisfactory, scrutiny of students' books showed that they are making inadequate progress because work is unfinished, poorly presented, and the quality unchallenged. Although there are some strengths to the pastoral care and support offered to students, the paucity of academic guidance in the classroom is a key factor in their underachievement and poor attitudes to learning.

In some instances, students' progress is being limited further by curriculum and timetable changes caused by the recent changes in staffing. While accepting that turbulence in the senior and middle management teams reduced opportunities to carry out formal lessons last term, it is nonetheless disappointing that, by the end of September, over half the teaching staff had not been subject to full lesson observations since the last inspection or since joining the school. In order to share the best practice, identify where there are weaknesses in teaching, and give staff clear direction to help them improve, it is essential that this programme of observation and intervention is accelerated rapidly.

#### **Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:**

- Improve the quality of learning by: identifying and eliminating weaknesses in teaching and bringing about rapid improvement so that there is no inadequate and more good and outstanding teaching – *inadequate*.

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

Although there remains much to do to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and raise students' achievements, inspectors recognise that satisfactory progress has been made in improving the school's management structures. The replacement of the Governing Body by the Interim Executive Board is a significant act by the local authority. The five board members bring with them a breadth of expertise and experience in finance, education and management, together with good understanding of the local community. While they are still in the early stage of getting to grips with their roles and the challenges that the school faces, each board member has now taken on a specific responsibility. The local authority is considering the appointment of a sixth board member to deepen this support further.

The return of three assistant headteachers from maternity leave has enabled the headteacher to restructure his senior leadership team. There are now very clear lines of responsibility that extend down from senior leaders to directors of learning and heads of department. A detailed meetings calendar is in place with regular line management meetings and planned work sampling. There is a positive attitude and clear determination for school improvement from the headteacher and his senior team, and there is no doubt that teaching staff accept the need to accept and face up to the challenges that the school faces. It is to the school's credit that this has been achieved against a background of a very large deficit budget and

redundancies. Nevertheless, while this represents satisfactory progress since the last inspection, there are some key systems that require immediate and significant attention if management is to improve further before the next monitoring visit. These include the quality and consistency of departmental self-evaluation, the way that the school monitors and evaluates the performance of different groups of students, and the monitoring of teaching. The school's equalities policies are still not monitored or evaluated as they should be.

The five NQTs, in the first month of their appointments, told inspectors that they feel well supported. All have mentors within their departments, and there is an appropriate programme of workshops in place. The NQT coordinator provides a good teaching role model, and Career Entry Development Profiles are up-to-date. As yet, however, they have not been formally observed teaching and this is a priority for the NQT coordinator and senior team.

All necessary safeguarding staff checks were found to be in order by inspectors, including for newly appointed staff. However, the school still does not take appropriate steps to log and report racist incidents or instances of bullying, and this must be rectified immediately.

### **Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:**

- Improve the overall quality of leadership and management by: ensuring that the work of those who have leadership responsibilities is regularly monitored by senior leaders and that they are given the support and challenge necessary for them to carry out all their responsibilities effectively – *satisfactory*.
- Bring about improvements at a more rapid pace than in the past by: ensuring that the school monitors and evaluates the impact of its work and policies on all groups of pupils more effectively – *inadequate*.
- Take the steps necessary to ensure that the school is well governed by: ensuring that all governors are well informed about their roles and responsibilities in governing the school – *satisfactory*.

### **External support**

Following the Special Measures judgement, the local authority published a statement of action outlining the steps necessary to improve the school's performance including key targets and dates for achieving success. This statement was evaluated by HMI and deemed appropriate. To date, the school has not met the interim performance targets set by the local authority. While there has been good support in replacing the Governing Body, establishing the Interim Executive Board, dealing with complex human resources issues and ensuring that the school's financial affairs are better

managed, there has been less focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school, and supporting the headteacher and senior team practically in improving teaching. The National Challenge Adviser has provided clear challenge and support, particularly in establishing systems to track and monitor students' academic performance; there is less evidence of these systems being used effectively by teachers in planning work and setting expectations that improve students' progress in lessons. The school has been supported by a high-achieving Suffolk upper school in training specialist physical education staff to teach mathematics in Year 9. It is too soon to assess the impact of this initiative on students' progress, although these teachers have approached the training very positively.

