

8 December 2010

Mr C Cavanagh
Headteacher
Debden Park High School
Willingdale Road
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Essex
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Dear Mr Cavanagh

Ofsted 2010–11 best practice survey: school governance

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your students, staff and governors, during my visit on 22 and 23 November 2010 to look at school governance.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in school governance. The publication will include case studies about individual schools. If Debden Park High School is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment before publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the identification of features of best practice included: discussions with you, the school's head boy and head girl, a range of governors, the clerk to the governing body and the School Improvement Partner. It also included a tour of the school and scrutiny of relevant documents.

Features of best practice

- The governing body and the school's senior leaders work well together as a team. Positive relationships are based on a clear understanding of their different roles and responsibilities.
- Information about the school's performance is presented to governors in a way which is clear and accessible. As a result, they are knowledgeable, act as a critical friend and hold leaders to account for students' outcomes.
- Governors ask pertinent questions and monitor closely the progress the school makes towards meeting its targets in the school development plan.
- Leadership is enhanced by the wide range of skills and expertise that governors bring to their role, for example in personnel and financial matters. In particular, governors from The Kemnal Academies Trust have

brought expertise and experience of working with schools in need of improvement.

- The work of committees is clearly focused on educational standards and resources. Meetings are run efficiently, making best use of governors' time.
- The clerk to the governors is central to the well-organised and efficient operation of the governing body. Papers are circulated in advance, policies and procedures are updated systematically and minutes of meetings are informative.
- All governors are made to feel welcome and able to contribute their views. A handbook for governors is a useful source of information for new governors, helping them to quickly understand their strategic role and the work of the governing body.
- Student representatives contribute to governors' understanding of the school's work, for example, by making presentations to them and giving them tours of the school.

Areas for development, which we discussed, include:

- considering strengthening the link between governors and students further. Some students feel that they have a role in promoting the work of governors but would like more information from governors about what they do.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to further develop governance.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Krafft
Her Majesty's Inspector