

6 July 2007

The Headteacher  
Debden Park High School  
Willingdale Road  
Loughton  
Essex  
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Dear Mr Cavanagh

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF DEBDEN PARK HIGH SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Lynne Kauffman, Peter Lawley, Brian Downes and Cheryl Jackson, Additional Inspectors to your school on the 19 and 20 June I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2007.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

### Context

Following the inspection that made the school subject to special measures the headteacher resigned. At the end of February 2007 the LA entered into a contract with Mr John Atkins a National Leader of Education and principal of Kemnal Technology College which is a National Support School, to lead the support for Debden Park. Mr Atkins assumed the post of executive headteacher and Mr Christian Cavanagh was appointed headteacher at Debden Park until 31 August 2008. A variety of staff from Kemnal Technology

College currently work for some part of the week at Debden Park. As a result of the school being placed in Special Measures the LA removed delegated financial powers from the governing body and appointed a support governor.

### Achievement and standards

The areas for improvement related to standards and achievement were included in other aspects of the January 2007 inspection report. Achievement was found to be inadequate overall. There is some evidence from lesson observations and school data that standards have improved and pupil progress has been enhanced where steps have been taken to improve teaching.

Despite significant efforts to address long term weaknesses in coursework production, for example within information and communication technology (ICT), the results of the 2007 Year 11 cohort are likely to be weak. However, as part of the development of the school's performing arts specialist status, over 100 Year 9 pupils have made good progress in an early entry expressive arts GCSE.

The outcomes of the 2007 public examinations and national tests will be reviewed in detail as part of the autumn term monitoring letter.

### Personal development and well-being

Behaviour has improved since the inspection of January 2007, pupils and staff report that the new behaviour policy is being implemented more consistently. This was summed up by a Year 10 boy who when asked to reflect on the changes he had observed in the current school year noted 'it is not about confrontation anymore it's about learning'. However, where teaching fails to engage pupils it also struggles to apply the accepted behaviour management strategies; as a result pupil disaffection and disengagement emerge.

Since the previous inspection the school has made good progress in improving attendance to a point close to the national average. There has been a dramatic fall in the number of exclusions particularly in the last three months. The pupils' attitude to learning is satisfactory and often good.

Appropriate procedures for safeguarding pupils and for health and safety in the classroom are in place. However, HMI discussed with senior staff a variety of health and safety hazards that relate to badly worn carpet on stairs and corridors; these matters need to be taken up with the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contractor. Pupils report that they feel happier and more secure in school especially since the change in leadership. They note that incidents of bullying or racism have decreased and that where they occur they are dealt with effectively.

The quality of academic guidance for pupils has improved. Pupils are now set more specific and realistic targets in many lessons and they are shown how to improve their work. However, form tutors are not engaged in a programme of academic mentoring and more needs to be made of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities tutor time could provide.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Implement an inclusive school behaviour management strategy that is fair, applied consistently, and promotes pupils' learning and enjoyment in school – satisfactory progress

### Quality of provision

The new leadership of the school has taken significant and well judged action to improve the quality of provision, although teaching and learning currently remains inconsistent. During this monitoring visit forty-eight lessons were observed; three-quarters were satisfactory or better and this included four out of ten that were good or outstanding.

Most inadequate lessons used limited teaching methods that failed to engage and inspire learners. There were few opportunities for independent learning and too many mundane tasks which required only low level contributions from the pupils.

During the inspection, senior staff intervened where teachers were struggling, although this was more successful in some cases than others. Inadequate teaching is being addressed through effective formal and informal monitoring and evaluation. Senior managers were invited to conduct joint lesson observations with HMI; the views they expressed concurred with the judgements given by inspectors. The robust system for monitoring and evaluating teaching is effectively linked to a professional development programme. New teachers to the school are effectively supported and they value the opportunity to hone their skills alongside an experienced colleague.

In good lessons pupils of all backgrounds and capabilities understood what was expected of them and they worked hard to achieve the learning objectives of the lesson. The productive working atmosphere and good relationships enabled teachers to use stimulating techniques that made pupils feel excited and confident about their progress.

The school has a small core of outstanding teachers. Their passion for their subjects was contagious; they ensured pupils understood the marking criteria and their high expectations produced a competitive atmosphere in class.

These staff facilitated learning, used challenging resources and gave pupils confidence to make decisions about their own learning. These teachers never missed an opportunity to assess, praise and encourage pupils to take a lead; they were well informed, confident, engaging and precise.

The range and quality of marking remains an area of weakness the school is beginning to address. Senior staff believe too much marking is infrequent or not sufficiently accurate to monitor learners' progress and HMI agree with this view. Assessment for Learning has been adopted to support planning, enliven learning techniques and monitor pupil progress.

Suitable curriculum planning for 2007-8 is now in place to tackle some weaknesses identified in the last report. For example, more curriculum time is to be given to English, mathematics, and physical education. Information and communication technology courses (ICT) courses have been re-planned to improve provision in Key Stage 4. Citizenship will be delivered in the humanities curriculum, where it will be assessed and monitored in line with statutory requirements. Effective steps have already been taken to improve languages teaching by concentrating efforts on the teaching of French. Action has been taken to rewrite schemes of work so that they are relevant and effective working instruments, further action will be needed to ensure that these meet the needs of all groups of learners. The impact of all of these changes will be evaluated at the next monitoring visit.

The range of vocational courses on offer is very restricted. Urgent action is needed to increase the scope of relevant vocational options for key groups of pupils by September 2007.

Specialist college status underpins effective provision in music and dance, although drama is less successful at GCSE. One notably successful innovation has been the expressive arts GCSE course in Year 9; pupil motivation and self confidence have risen as a result of relevant provision which engages and inspires.

The cross curricular effect of specialist status has yet to impact fully on improved provision across the curriculum. Early successful steps have been taken to allow performing arts specialists to work alongside teachers in other disciplines. The approach requires further refinement.

There have been significant improvements in the quality of SEN provision since the arrival of the new management team. However, whilst leadership has focussed on the main issues to be tackled there has been insufficient time, since the change in management, to complete the review and evaluate provision.

The criteria for withdrawing pupils for additional literacy and numeracy support needs to be reconsidered on a whole school basis. Currently, withdrawal provision is not part of a coordinated approach with English and mathematics and no use is being made of appropriate DfES support programmes for younger pupils. There is a lack of coherent strategies for key skills 'catch up' for pupils in all years of the school; a review of this matter should involve the performing arts specialist staff.

By the time of the next monitoring visit there needs to be systems in place which clearly track the achievement of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Equally, these pupils need to be supported in mainstream lessons by Individual Education Plans (IEPs) which are practical, brief working documents.

It has not been possible to reverse the inadequate curriculum provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as half of the students who require additional support have only been identified in recent weeks but this needs to be in place for the start of the next academic year.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Provide stability and continuity for pupils by developing and retaining a strong teaching and support staff – satisfactory progress
- Ensure high-quality learning experiences for all pupils through a well-planned curriculum and by eliminating inadequate teaching raising the quality of teaching to that of the best - inadequate progress

### Leadership and management

Significant steps have been taken to improve the quality of provision and raise standards. In the 11 weeks since the arrival of the new management team, robust monitoring and evaluation procedures have been applied to all areas of the school's work. The evidence that has been uncovered in this detailed analysis is being used to reappraise provision for September 2007. Performance management procedures have been introduced and as a result nearly a third of the staff currently employed will not be working at Debden Park in the new academic year. Professional development opportunities and targets have been agreed with all staff. The headteacher has taken the opportunity to deploy senior staff, visiting specialists from Kemnal Technology College and consultants from the LA to improve provision. A new staffing structure which provides a range of leadership responsibilities has recently

been put in place. The impact of this reorganisation will be reviewed in the next monitoring letter. The school is fully staffed for the next academic year.

Inadequate ICT facilities will all be replaced during the summer holidays in classrooms and offices. This will allow significantly better opportunities for ICT to enhance learning, improve parental communications and provide greater flexibility in the further development of assessment for learning. The school budget has been agreed by the governing body. The LA has indicated its intention to return delegated financial powers to the school when a five year budget recovery plan is approved at the beginning of July 2007.

Meetings with parents have taken place to explain decisions and the key actions initiated. New school behaviour management strategies have been clarified to both parents and pupils with positive developments in the rate of attendance and exclusion. The pupils speak well of the efforts made by the headteacher and senior staff.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Establish rigorous leadership at all levels that provides challenge and support to ensure that high quality outcomes of care and education for pupils are achieved - good progress

#### External support

Following discussion between the DfES and the LA, the decision to offer a contract to a National Leader of Education was timely and the match of the National Support School was appropriate, given the needs of the school. Debden Park staff speak well of the support received from all branches of the LA, and from their colleagues from Kemnal Technology College.

The LA plans to advertise for a substantive headteacher in January 2008 in order to have a person in place on the termination of the National Support School contract with Kemnal College. The time frame for this process is inappropriate; any incoming appointee should be in place to benefit from the support available within the terms of the current contract. A substantive headteacher should be in post by January 2008 or at the latest Easter 2008 in order to secure value for money from the current arrangements.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– satisfactory

Up to 3 newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the support procedures agreed with Kemnal College and the Davenant Foundation School.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Use the revised assessment for learning procedures to focus on improving achievement.
- Review the balance of curriculum provision to need and extend as soon as possible the range of vocational courses provided to appropriate groups.
- Eliminate the remaining weaknesses in teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector