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Mr J Goodchild  
Headteacher  
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Hunstanton  
PE36 5HY

Dear Mr Goodchild

**Special measures: monitoring inspection of Smithdon High School**

Following my visit with Carol Evatt, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29–30 May 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 be appointed.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Gray  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2011**

- Improve the quality of students' learning, accelerate their progress and raise standards by:
  - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good and outstanding lessons
  - planning interesting learning activities that actively engage all students
  - improving the quality and impact of assessment and marking
  - promoting more positive attitudes to learning so that students are keen to succeed and proud of their achievements.
  
- Improve provision and outcomes in the sixth form by:
  - making effective use of assessment information to raise students' aspirations, review their progress and guide their improvement
  - ensuring that the curriculum and teaching meet the needs and aspirations of the students
  - providing clear strategic leadership and effective day-to-day management.
  
- Ensure that leaders and managers at every level deliver improvement by:
  - modelling best practice in their own work
  - fulfilling their strategic roles
  - monitoring rigorously and evaluating effectively to plan further development.

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

### **Report from the second monitoring inspection on 29–30 May 2012**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, teachers, middle and senior managers, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.

Inspectors visited an assembly and 29 lessons, including making four joint observations with school staff.

#### **Context**

Due to the reduction in the number of pupils on roll, the school was going through a redundancy procedure at the time of the inspection, with several staff expected to leave at the end of the current school year. There have been a number of other changes to staffing since the last monitoring visit, including at senior level. The level of staff absence due to illness, maternity leave and other reasons is high. The school continues to face difficulties in recruiting to core subjects, despite repeated advertisements and the offer of incentives.

#### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The school is targeting 55% of pupils to gain five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grade C or above. This would bring it much closer to the national average than in previous years. No Year 11 classes could be observed during this inspection but, in Year 10 lessons, good preparation for exam modules was evident in the work that classes were doing in English and French. Learning is being supported by a greater focus on exam criteria, although too much time in lessons practising exam techniques risks taking the place, in some cases, of the development of knowledge and understanding. The school's assessments suggest that the proportion of pupils making the expected progress in science is below that in English and mathematics. Good learning was seen in several subjects in Year 10, including in English, humanities, French and music, but there were too many lessons where new learning was modest.

Attainment in the lower years presents a mixed picture, with pupils' levels still some way below aspirational targets and suggesting that too few are likely to achieve the higher levels. In some cases, pupils' targets are well within their capabilities. In almost all Key Stage 3 lessons observed by inspectors, teachers readily provided assessment details, but this was not the case in art, mathematics or science. In a few instances, assessments appeared to be overly optimistic. The school maintains

some tracking data for the core subjects in Years 7 to 9 but analysis of performance in other subjects is less developed at present.

Support for literacy and the development of reading in lessons is not consistent enough. Too many pupils make basic errors and all teachers, including those in the English department, need to rigorously challenge mistakes being made in the lesson, whether part of the assessment criteria or not. Simple grammatical errors influence pupils' basic skills, including their future abilities in areas such as completing job application forms. The school also lacks a strategic analysis of its impact on improving the reading of those with low prior attainment and has no clear evaluation of the deployment and effectiveness of its learning support assistants, some of whom were seen to be inefficiently deployed. Pupils have too few opportunities to raise the standard of their oral skills through extending speaking.

It was not possible to observe the standards of post-16 pupils during this inspection, but data available to inspectors suggested that the completion rate is far too low in too many of the courses offered. For the current Year 13, retention rates have been exceptionally poor and students have not been well served by previous policies for guiding them onto courses. The school considered January module results to be 'disappointing'. A review of achievement and the curriculum in the sixth form has identified enhanced opportunities through increased partnerships with another school and a GFE college, although the main benefits of this will not be seen until 2013. Robust processes have been introduced to improve the culture and study skills of those on post-16 course, and also to ensure that students are not recruited to courses where they have no reasonable prospect of success. Strategic management of the sixth form is now in the hands of the deputy headteacher and so better integrated into the mainstream systems of the school; supervision of students has been improved, for example in the monitoring of attendance.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve provision and outcomes in the sixth form – satisfactory.

### **The quality of teaching**

Inspectors found teaching to be still inadequate in roughly one in five lessons, which aligns with the school's own analysis. Other lessons divided evenly between good and satisfactory teaching. In the shared observations, school leaders made the same judgements as inspectors. Leaders are pursuing the correct agenda to improve teaching but there are still too many teachers who are applying the policies inexpertly and none who are yet able to do so with real flair and vigour. Teachers show a high level of adherence to school policies, though less expertise in converting this into challenging teaching.

Teachers have taken seriously the need to focus on exam criteria and to promote pupil self- and peer-assessment, although the result during the inspection appeared to be a very unvaried learning diet, particularly for pupils in Year 10. Most lessons move at a steady pace, feature good relationships, and mostly have lesson objectives set out, although objectives rarely provide appropriate challenge to all groups of learners. Teachers are not using the opportunities presented by pupils' improved behaviour and attitudes to develop more stimulating learning activities, so that pupils play only a limited role in promoting their own learning. Literacy and pupils' social development remain at too low a priority in teachers' planning.

The school has worked hard to provide an energetic and focussed professional development programme that has had clear impact on teachers' awareness of practice but it has not yet succeeded in transforming the skills of all individuals. Nonetheless, staff spoke warmly about the benefits of sharing ideas and good practice, and of their work on specific themes. Bringing together staff from different subject areas was seen as very helpful.

Pupils commented in discussions with inspectors that teaching has improved, but not universally. Pupils told governors in March that there had been improvements in mathematics, English and art, but not in science.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of the students' learning, accelerate their progress and raise standards – satisfactory.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils, staff and managers all agree that behaviour has improved. This is reflected in carefully maintained data on exclusions from lesson and detentions. As a result, the school is making changes to its processes for managing those withdrawn from lessons. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are more likely to spend time in the inclusion room than other pupils; in Year 11, 23 out of the 40 pupils involved had special educational needs. Inspectors saw behaviour in lessons that was always satisfactory and quite often good, but pupils had no opportunities to demonstrate outstanding behaviour and attitudes to learning because the teaching methods used placed limits on the contribution they could make.

Attendance stands at 93% so far this year, broadly the same as last year but a little below national figures, with that of girls lower than for boys in all year groups. The attendance of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is less than that of other pupils, especially in Year 11. Persistent absence is higher for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals than for others.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Leaders have been much occupied with managing the school's reduction in staff and also managing a number of competency processes. It has been possible to bring the issues together to some extent, but this has still occupied many hours of senior staff time. At the same time, there are key vacancies due to challenges in recruitment, with the head of science role a particularly important one to fill in a department where there remains too much weak teaching.

Staff and middle leaders are positive about the improvement of the school. Staff groups commented that the restructuring of the middle leadership into larger departments had improved professional debate, helped to share good practice, and reduced the isolation of smaller teams. Many felt that leadership had improved as a result, although not in all subject areas. Some, but not all, middle leaders model good practice in their lessons but none are yet demonstrating any outstanding teaching. The quality of practice, for example in the selection of appropriate learning objectives, still varies between subject teams. The quality of planning overall has improved but much remains to be done. Middle leaders need to be contributing more to raising expectations about what outstanding teaching looks like.

Monitoring of teaching through formal observation, learning walks, and reviews of lesson plans and marking, has continued and is robust, although the number of formal observations in the spring term was much below that in the autumn. Recently, monitoring has concentrated on staff identified as priorities for improvement. Many teachers now welcome having their lessons observed, and some see personal feedback as a professional benefit. More could be done to improve the use of tracking data in Years 7 to 9 and to challenge the subject teachers. Insufficient use is made of data about pupils' performance from Key Stage 2, although there are procedures to gather this baseline information.

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum and timetable, as a result of which the shape of the school day will change from September, with the aim of using teaching time more efficiently.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development remains limited. One reason for this is that teachers are not confident using questioning to prompt reflection or in handling debate.

The governing body has been restructured and reduced in number. There is a governors' development plan, which is carefully monitored. A small group of three governors, including one with headship and inspection experience, form a focussed task force that is contributing to the enhanced monitoring and accountability mechanisms, including attending some senior leadership team meetings. A group of staff specifically commented on the active engagement of the governing body in appropriate monitoring activities and the process whereby heads of subject report to governing body meetings. In turn, governors commented on the greater detail being

provided for them by the headteacher. Nevertheless, further information should be included about the progress, attendance and behaviour of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and the progress of pupils in Years 7 to 9. Reports would also be improved by more consistent use of percentages rather than raw numbers, for example in reporting on the types of pupil being excluded.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that leaders and managers at every level deliver improvement – satisfactory.

### **External support**

The school continues to receive regular support from a consultant, part-funded by the local authority. It now also needs its staff to have more regular and sustained exposure to a culture of outstanding teaching. It has not got any close working partnership with a school that has been judged to have outstanding teaching. As a result, staff still have too limited aspirations in terms of outstanding professional practice. There is a role for external support in brokering this for the school but it is recognised that the school's large distance from a suitable partner presents a challenge, but one which must be overcome. There is a county recruitment strategy which may help with advising on the recruitment of the key staff the school needs to sustain its improvement.