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20 October 2014

Emma Paramor  
Ramsden Hall School  
School Lane  
Langham  
Colchester  
CO4 5PA

Dear Ms Paramor

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Ramsden Hall School**

Following my visit to your school on 16–17 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2014. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Essex.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Cc. Chair of the Governing Body  
Cc. Local authority  
Cc. The Secretary of State

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014.**

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good on the Billericay site by making sure that:
  - teachers plan interesting and challenging work
  - marking is used effectively to help students to improve their work
  - teachers set work at the right level, particularly for the more-able students.
  
- Improve students' behaviour and safety, particularly on the Billericay site by ensuring that:
  - fixed term exclusions and racist incidents decrease
  - attendance improves further throughout the school
  - the behaviour policy is understood by all staff and students, applied consistently by staff and its effectiveness checked by leaders.
  
- Improve leadership and management at all levels, especially on the Billericay site, including governance, by making sure that:
  - accurate records which track students' past and current progress are used effectively by leaders to evaluate the school's work and by teachers in planning their lessons
  - the roles of subject leaders are developed, particularly in English and mathematics, so that teaching and achievement improve
  - governors and other leaders promote a shared understanding of good practice in teaching and learning across both sites, to secure equal access to a similarly good standard of education and support for all students.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should also be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16–17 October**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, and scrutinised documents and incident logs. She met with the interim executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, representatives of the interim executive board (IEB), and a representative from the local authority. Informal meetings were held with two groups of students. The inspector also spoke to individual staff and students.

### **Context**

The school is situated on two sites which are 40 miles apart. Since the previous monitoring visit the Acting Principal at Billericay has resigned following a period of absence and the Vice Principal has retired.

The acting headteacher of the Langham site continues to be interim executive head of both the Billericay and Langham sites. Two assistant head teachers and one senior leader have been internally appointed on the Billericay site. These senior leaders are fulfilling this role in addition to their previous responsibilities. The post of Director of School, who will have oversight of the Billericay site, has been advertised but no appointment was made. This post has now been re-advertised.

Discussions between the local authority and the Department for Education are ongoing about linking each of the school sites, separately, with a sponsoring academy.

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

The achievement of students is a very split picture. The progress and attainment of students attending the Billericay site are significantly below that of students at the Langham site. The legacy of low standards at Billericay has not yet been adequately addressed. In contrast, GCSE results achieved by students at Langham in 2014 were the best set of results ever recorded by the school.

In lessons on the Billericay site, students' attainment and progress vary. In some lessons, students make good progress. In others, students' progress is slow and not sufficient to raise standards. In a few lessons, progress is inadequate.

Students attending the Langham site continue to make stronger progress in English than in mathematics, but there is recent evidence of improving achievement in mathematics. Standards in technology are high.

## **The quality of teaching**

Inadequate teaching on the Billericay site has not been eliminated. The degree to which teachers set work at the right level of difficulty for all groups of students, including the most able, remains inconsistent. As a result, students do not make the progress they are capable of. Marking is often poor. Teachers do not always give students precise enough feedback about how to improve and extend their work. The lack of focus on the subject specific skills students need to strengthen their work means they are unsure of what steps they need to take to progress in their learning. However, in art students respond to the detailed feedback they are given and make rapid progress.

On the Langham site teachers nearly always have high expectations of what students can achieve and use a range of high-quality resources to support and engage students. They use their strong subject knowledge to skilfully develop and extend students' understanding. Teachers in these subjects make helpful links between the learning in lessons and the GCSE qualifications students will take, this is motivating students to work even harder. Some feedback is of a very high standard, for example, the detailed comments on Year 8 English work help students to develop their use of evocative vocabulary.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Arrangements to ensure that pupils are safe are inadequate. Staff are not aware of the requirements of 'Keeping children safe in education' guidance (DFE April 2014). Students say that they feel less safe when the headteacher is not on the site. The lack of availability and visibility of senior team due to their teaching commitments has a detrimental impact on students' behaviour.

The very poor attendance of pupils at the Billericay site has not been adequately addressed. However, there is a reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions.

Changes to the behaviour policy are not consistently applied by all staff across both sites. At Billericay, students' behaviour has shown little improvement. The impact on behaviour of the support provided by staff is not yet seen. The channels for students to feedback their views are under-developed.

The use of outreach support and alternative provision is well managed and meets the needs of particular students.

Students' engagement in their learning is most effective when their behaviour difficulties are planned for by teachers. In these lessons there is a relaxed atmosphere and teachers detailed planning of activities ensure that students are able to manage their feelings, and self-regulate their behaviour very effectively. Teachers do this by carefully thinking about how groupings will work and by being

proactive in intervening before difficulties arise. In a mathematics lesson on the Langham site, students managed their frustrations of not being able to complete the algebraic equation. They asked appropriately for more help and could talk themselves through their difficulty.

Behaviour across class groups on both sites is now tracked more effectively. Staff have a spreadsheet on which details of incidents are recorded. This is proving helpful in identifying trends and the impact of interventions. It also shows that the recorded incidents of inappropriate behaviour have increased since September. This increase is on both sites and is a result of the lack of visibility of senior leaders combined with the uncertainties students feel about the future of the schools.

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

There are inadequacies in the arrangements to safeguard students. Leaders do not make the required checks on staffs' suitability to work with children.

There is a lack of clarity around leadership roles and responsibilities. Some leaders have been promoted to roles without enough time or training to complete these and there are insufficient staff to ensure senior leaders are able to reduce their teaching commitment and increase their leadership time.

Senior leaders and the IEB agree that too many significant actions have not yet been implemented or had the intended impact. Staff absence is high and several senior leaders are new to role or in acting positions. Management roles and responsibilities need to be secured as matter of urgency. The arrangements to manage two sites 40 miles apart are not suitable and result in very different student experiences.

The monitoring of the action plan does not reflect the current picture of the slow progress made at the Billericay site. Teaching has not improved quickly or securely enough to effectively tackle the long-established underachievement of students. The interim executive headteacher and senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning through a programme of frequent lesson observations. However, observations do not focus sufficiently on scrutinising the quality of students' work or on improving teachers' knowledge of individual subjects. Consequently, some of the school's judgements on the overall quality of teaching and learning are too generous.

The IEB fulfil their role appropriately and offer support and challenge to the senior team. They ensure direct communication with staff on both sites by offering drop-in sessions. The IEB have a good understanding of the problems at the Billericay site but have had difficulty in appointing senior staff to add capacity to the leadership team.

### **External support**

The local authority continues to provide appropriate support and challenge to the school through regular monitoring meetings. The local authority has taken a wide range of actions to try and secure additional staff. It has recently commissioned support for leadership and teaching from a local external consultant. It has an accurate picture of the schools' difficulties.

**Priorities for further improvement:**

- Take immediate action to ensure that all pre-appointment checks are carried out and that all staff are up to date with the latest safeguarding information.
- Make sure that there are enough senior leaders, with sufficient time and expertise, to do what is required to move the school forward rapidly.