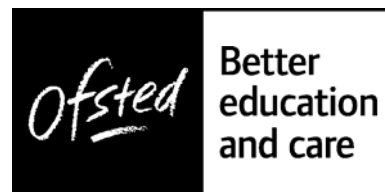


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Mr C Richardson  
The Executive Headteacher  
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12 May 2006

Dear Mr Richardson

## **SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WADHAM SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Peter Clifton, Valerie Greatrex and Anthony Shield, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 15 and 16 March 2006, 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 October 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school at work, including 29 lessons and 3 tutor periods, and scrutinised a range of documents. Inspectors met with groups of students from Years 9, 11 and 13 and a group representing senior students and the school council. They also met the executive headteacher, the acting headteacher and nominated staff, the chair of governors and representatives of the local authority.

### **Context**

The headteacher in post at the time of the inspection in October 2005 left the school in late November. The school has been led and managed by an

executive team, comprising an executive headteacher and acting headteacher, since December 2005. This team, a headteacher and assistant headteacher from another Somerset school for 13 to 19 year olds over 50 miles away, is in place until the end of the spring term 2006. The executive headteacher is based in Wadham School two days a week and the acting headteacher full time. The senior leadership group of Wadham School, comprising two deputy headteachers and two assistant headteachers, remains the same as at the time of the inspection.

The school was unsuccessful in January 2006 in its attempt to appoint a new, permanent headteacher. The post was readvertised in March with interviews scheduled for April 2006. Temporary arrangements for the leadership of the school for the summer term 2006 have yet to be secured.

The chair and vice chair of governors stepped down shortly after the inspection. The local authority has recently removed delegated powers from the governing body.

### **Achievement and standards**

The progress students make and the standards they attain in national tests and examinations are inadequate. The dramatic fall in the proportion of students gaining 5 or more 5A\*–C GCSEs in 2005 resulted in the school widely missing its targets. Attainment is significantly lower than the national average. The school has correctly identified the very poor provision for lower ability students, weak teaching and poor behaviour as key factors affecting both the progress and attainment of students.

There is too much variation between subjects in the progress students make and the standards they attain. A programme of activities is being implemented to support Year 11 students preparing for GCSE examinations. This includes guidance on completing coursework and focused revision sessions. The students report general improvement in the support they are receiving as they prepare for their examinations. It is too early, however, to evaluate the overall impact of the activities being provided. The negative attitudes of some students in Year 11 are preventing them from gaining maximum benefit from these initiatives. The rate of students' progress varies between lessons and in some it is too slow.

The school is developing its system for monitoring students' progress. Whilst this identifies a range of suitable points to measure students' attainment, it does not provide enough information about how to evaluate the progress they are making. The proposed processes for setting individual subject targets lack clarity.

Progress being made by students in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2005:

- raise achievement at GCSE—inadequate.

### **Personal development and well-being**

Students' personal development and well being are inadequate. Whilst there are students who are keen to learn and to do well, too many others lack motivation and are not interested in school. This core of disaffected students, mainly although not exclusively in Year 11, has a disproportionate impact on the attitudes and learning of others. As a result, the climate for learning is still too negative in too many lessons.

Students' attendance levels are too low. Processes for monitoring attendance have been improved and are giving the school better information on which to address the issue. Appropriate strategies have been introduced to improve attendance. However, these have yet to have a significant impact on reducing levels of absence, both authorised and unauthorised. Nevertheless, satisfactory progress has been made since the inspection in October 2005 to improve students' attendance.

Behaviour is satisfactory. The executive team has acted swiftly to restore a sense of order and set clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour. These necessary measures have been welcomed by both staff and students. Expectations are much clearer and students know the message, 'actions bring consequences', which is at the heart of the school's behaviour management strategy. The effective restoration of the school uniform and systems for recognising and rewarding students' achievements have contributed to a more positive ethos in the school. However, whilst many examples of courteous and sensitive behaviour were observed, there is still some poor behaviour. Behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons are inconsistent. Where teaching is successful students are effectively engaged in their learning and behave appropriately. However, unsuccessful teaching fails to motivate students and leads to disruptive behaviour. The number of fixed term exclusions is falling but remains too high. The recently established supervised learning unit provides an effective sanction for those whose behaviour in lessons is inappropriate. This is part of the management strategy to improve behaviour. It still has a significant, but reducing, number of referrals. Improvements in behaviour have led to students feeling safer in school. They report that bullying is usually dealt with quickly and effectively.

The new procedures for managing behaviour are making a difference but they rely too heavily on the leadership of the executive team and, with their imminent departure, improvements are fragile.

The school's provision for supporting students' personal and social development is inadequate. There is currently no programme for personal, social and health education nor a coherent programme for the use of tutor

time to develop students' social and personal skills. However, the school has sound plans in place to address these issues through a revised curriculum to be implemented in September 2006. Students report that their views are increasingly being recognised and valued especially through the school council. The executive team has, for example, ensured that drinking water is available in response to a request from the school council. Students involved particularly appreciated the consultative role they played in the recent appointment procedures for seeking a new headteacher. Students in the sixth form have generally positive attitudes to learning and they make a constructive contribution to the life of the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2005:

- improve behaviour—good progress
- improve attitudes to learning in lessons—satisfactory progress.

### **Quality of provision**

Both the inspectors and executive team judge the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stages 3 and 4 to be inadequate. The executive team has secured a clear picture of the strengths and areas for improvement.

Where teaching is unsuccessful, expectations of students are low and teaching is not sufficiently focused on the needs of all students. Lesson planning lacks rigour and is not sharply focused on learning outcomes. Routine and unstimulating activities fail to inspire and motivate students and this often leads to inappropriate behaviour. Assessment is not being used to inform students' learning and marking is often poor and superficial. This means that students do not know what they need to do next to make progress. Students in these lessons do not make progress at a sufficiently rapid rate. Insufficient attention is paid in lessons to the learning needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

There are an insufficient number of good lessons. Where teaching is good, however, students are provided with a range of interesting activities which engage and challenge them. Relationships between teachers and students are strong and students behave appropriately. In these lessons students make good progress. Teaching and learning continues to be stronger in the sixth form than in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Students generally feel supported in school and report that if they have a problem they know how they can receive help. The processes for supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities are insufficiently robust to ensure that the needs of all these students are carefully defined and that they receive appropriate learning experiences in all lessons.

Processes for monitoring students' progress are inadequate. Benchmarking has been introduced which identifies key points at which attainment is

measured and this is satisfactory. The tracking of individual students' progress, however, is inadequate. There is insufficient understanding and use of targets by teachers for students to know what they need to do to make progress in their learning.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2005:

- monitor students' progress more effectively—inadequate progress.

### **Leadership and management**

The members of the executive team, within a short space of time, have made a positive impact on the school. This is most noticeable in the way in which they have brought a sense of order and calm through improving behaviour. They have given the school a sense of direction with a clear focus on restoring acceptable behaviour and improving teaching and learning. They have rekindled a sense of hope in the school and gained the confidence of most of the governors, staff and students. They are a strong and visible presence in the school.

The executive team has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school and this is reflected in a realistic assessment of the school's current position. They adopted a pragmatic approach in tackling urgent issues, particularly behaviour, and the school improvement plan covering their term in the school reflects this. The team has introduced a teaching framework and a rigorous system of lesson observations which it has undertaken and had supported by regular external reviews.

The school reports that almost fifty management policies have been introduced by the executive team. Members of staff and students have particularly supported and welcomed measures which have restored order to the school and brought about improvements in behaviour.

Initial improvements in the school are heavily dependent on the leadership of this team. The processes underlying them have yet to embed and the confidence of the staff to implement them without the executive team is not secure. There is no school improvement plan in place from April 2006 to focus the work of the school or against which to measure progress. Members of the school's senior leadership group have welcomed the steps introduced by the executive team and they have each taken the lead on a school improvement activity. However, they have not undertaken lesson observations since the inspection and they are not, at present, sufficiently strong enough to drive through the necessary improvements the school needs without additional support.

The roles and responsibilities of subject and pastoral leaders are not clearly defined. There are no coherent or consistently implemented processes by which these leaders monitor and evaluate the work of their subjects or areas.

Students, staff and governors all express concern about how the school will progress following the impending departure of the executive team. This concern is compounded by the fact that the leadership of the school for the summer term has not yet been secured, although the local authority reported that it is confident that it is close to resolving the matter. The current position concerning the leadership and management of the school leaves initial gains fragile and further progress insufficiently secure.

The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of three additional governors and there is a new chair and vice chair of governors. The capacity of the governing body to fulfil its responsibilities is not yet secure. The process of seeking to appoint a new headteacher and the training being effectively provided by the local authority have, however, provided valuable opportunities for governors to increase their understanding of their roles, particularly in terms of monitoring the work of the school and holding leaders to account.

Serious concerns about the impact of specialist school status have been identified by the school and it is recognised that a full review of this will have to be undertaken.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2005:

- improve the impact of and consistency of management policies—the leadership and management of the executive team have had a strong, positive impact, but overall progress against this area for improvement is inadequate.

### **External support**

The local authority acted quickly and effectively to support the governing body in securing interim leadership and management of the school through the executive team. It is now faced with the urgent need to secure the leadership of the school from the beginning of the summer term. Aspects of the local authority's support have been good. This includes the curriculum support negotiated with the executive team by the school's link adviser and training being provided for the governing body. The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory. However, there is a lack of clarity amongst stakeholders of the local authority's strategy for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the school. The role of the core group, in particular, is not clearly understood. The plan of this group needs to be aligned to the next school improvement plan and clear milestones and success criteria against which to measure progress established. The coordination of the local authority's work with the school is insufficiently robust.

## **Main Judgements**

Progress since being subject to special measures—although the leadership and management of the executive team have made a strong, positive impact and brought about improvement in targeted areas, overall progress against indicators since being made subject to special measures is inadequate.

Quality of LA's statement of action—satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Secure effective senior leadership and management of the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Define the role and responsibilities of subject and pastoral leaders and secure their contribution to school improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children and Young People for Somerset and the Diocesan Director of Education for Bath and Wells.

Yours sincerely

Valerie Pearson  
**H M Inspector**