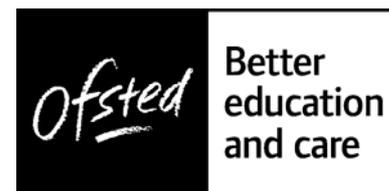


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8 May 2006

Mr S Davidson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Davidson

## **SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE THOMAS LORD AUDLEY SCHOOL AND LANGUAGE COLLEGE**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Barbara Hilton, Mike Milton and Rod Passant, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 26 and 27 April 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 November 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's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, chair of governors, the finance officer, a representative from the local authority, the school improvement partner and a number of the teaching staff.

### **Context**

There have been no significant changes since the inspection in November 2005.

## **Achievement and standards**

Standards remain low though evidence from the inspection and from the school's own assessments show that they are rising. Improvements are particularly evident in modern foreign languages in Year 11 and in English. Particular attention has been paid to raising the standards at which pupils in Years 9 and 11 are working and this has had some effect. The recent progress of Year 11 pupils has been satisfactory but it is not good enough to redress their underachievement since year 7. In Year 11 about one third of pupils are reaching standards which are in line with national expectations, but few exceed this.

Procedures for gathering and using assessment data have improved. Teachers are better at assessing the levels at which pupils are working, predicting their future performance, monitoring their progress and setting suitable work. This is helping to improve progress, though it remains too variable across subjects. It is good in history and geography. In mathematics the decision to enter some pupils in Year 8 for their national tests a year early has helped to increase their motivation.

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

- improve achievement and raise standards of attainment through ensuring teachers are able accurately to determine the level pupils are working at and have high expectations of future performance – satisfactory progress, particularly in Years 9 and 11.

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

Behaviour around the school and in the majority of lessons is satisfactory. The school has developed sensible strategies to improve behaviour. Pupils value these and report that they have led to improvements, but that they are not used consistently. There was a reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions in the spring term. Pupils report that the amount of bullying has reduced and are appreciative of the role of learning mentors.

The opportunities provided for personal development in tutor group 'community lessons' are too undemanding and do not make good use of time. Some younger pupils find the mixed-age tutor groups supportive and helpful, but some find their early experience of them 'daunting' and 'intimidating'.

The school has further developed its systems for monitoring and encouraging good attendance, including seeking the involvement of parents. As a result there is a slight reduction in the amount of unauthorised absence, but there is not a significant impact overall.

There have been improvements in the quality of food provided and the number of healthy options available, which pupils appreciate. Pupils are still concerned about locked toilets and a lack of soap and toilet paper.

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

- improve attendance and pupils' attitudes to learning by incorporating tasks into lessons which challenge pupils and match their interests and abilities – satisfactory progress.

### **Quality of provision**

The quality of teaching is inadequate. A good range of strategies has been introduced to bring about improvements. This has had success, but not sufficient to reduce the amount of inadequate teaching. The school's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is accurate.

In lessons where pupils' learning is good, there is good behaviour and a commitment to work hard from the pupils; there are constructive relationships, and teaching strategies and activities motivate the pupils. Questions are used to both extend and assess pupils' learning. Teaching assistants are generally effective and, in the best lessons, teachers plan specifically for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. In most lessons, the objectives are shared with pupils, but they are not always used at the end of lessons to assess the progress pupils have made. Key weaknesses of inadequate lessons are ineffective management of the class so that attitudes to learning are not good enough; a slow pace of learning and low expectations of what pupils can do.

There are inconsistencies in the contribution that different subjects make to the improvement of pupils' literacy skills. In the best lessons, teachers encourage the pupils to use the new vocabulary that they have just learnt and pupils have opportunities to complete a range of different types of writing, with structured support as necessary. In too many lessons insufficient attention is paid to developing pupils' literacy.

Assessment has been improved since the inspection. Half-termly assessments in each subject are based on the requirements of the National Curriculum or public examinations. Pupils know their current standards in different subjects and their end-of-year targets. There is inconsistency between subjects in the use of assessment to help pupils learn.

Care guidance and support have improved through the changes that have been made to the monitoring and tracking of pupils' academic progress. There are inconsistencies in the way this is followed up.

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

- strengthen the quality of teaching and learning by close monitoring which focuses on how much learning is taking place in lessons and whether pupils are making enough progress – inadequate progress.

## Leadership and management

The school's leadership and management are broadly satisfactory because they have, since the last inspection, brought about some improvements to some important aspects of the school's work. There is an improved use of the data about pupils' abilities and performance and there are improving standards in Years 9 and 11. However, there is too much inconsistency in the way the school operates. The school's development plan does not show clearly how the work needing to be done will be prioritised and sequenced. There is also little reference to how the Local Authority's resources will be deployed. Although developments are monitored and evaluated there is not enough effective follow-up where improvements are slow.

The approach taken by senior leaders in working with department and pastoral leaders is inconsistent and this is hampering improvement. Where senior leaders meet department and pastoral leaders frequently and both support and hold them to account for the developments they are responsible for, clear improvement is resulting. Because of inconsistencies in leadership approaches, different parts of the school are developing at different rates and the differences in the quality of both teaching and pastoral support which pupils receive is too wide. This is evident for example in the implementation of the strategy for improving behaviour, the setting of homework, and the steps taken to ensure that pupils are making sufficient progress.

Some good strategies for improvement have been introduced by some subject departments. For example, assessments of pupils' work have been analysed to find which areas they find difficult. This has led to the ways in which those parts of the subject are taught to be reviewed and improved. Although there are means of sharing good practice such as this, its adoption by others is not actively enough promoted.

Governors support the school well. They are doing this through difficult times while still providing challenge. The chair of governors is well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school's budget deficit has been eliminated and governors are kept well informed about expenditure.

The languages department has worked to improve standards and there is evidence from external modular examinations that the department will meet its targets this year. The department is well led but there is some confusion over roles of teachers with different responsibilities in the department.

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

- improve leadership and management by the effective use of reliable data to monitor and secure the achievement of challenging targets which raise standards – satisfactory progress.

## **External support**

The Local Authority has provided significant support for the school and the work of the school improvement partner has been well received by staff. The Local Authority's statement of action is satisfactory and shows that resources are being well deployed to help the school to improve. There is a good process for monitoring progress. However the target date for the school no longer requiring special measures is too optimistic.

## **Main Judgements**

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed except in some departments with the prior approval of HMI.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

1. Use information from data to identify areas of weakness in learning in different subjects so that the teaching of those areas can be improved.
2. Bring about greater consistency in the way the school operates by using monitoring and evaluation, including using pupils' and parents' views, to identify where change is slow.

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

Alan Alder  
**H M Inspector**