



18 October 2006

Mr S Davidson
The Headteacher
The Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College
Monkwick Avenue,
Colchester
CO2 8NJ

Dear Mr Davidson

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

Introduction

Following my visit with Kevin Corrigan, Jackie Cousins and Sandra Tweddell, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 27 and 28 September 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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, senior staff and subject leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority and the school's improvement partner.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school since the last visit.

Achievement and standards

Evidence from the school indicates that in the 2006 national tests for the pupils in Year 9, and in GCSE examinations there was an improvement in performance compared to recent years. Standards remain below national averages. However, the targets agreed with the local authority for the proportion of pupils in Year 9 reaching the national expectations were achieved in English, mathematics and science. Furthermore, the Year 9 pupils made progress in line with that made nationally. GCSE results show an increase in the percentage gaining five or more passes at grades A*-C but much of the improvement has come from girls rather than boys. This is not the case in Year 9 where the difference between the standards achieved by girls and boys are not significant.

The data shows a considerable difference between the pupils' performance in different subjects at GCSE with pupils performing poorly in modern foreign languages.

Despite the improvements in the school's provisional results, the progress pupils make in too many lessons is currently inadequate and standards of work are too low. A number of strategies to raise standards, for example through booster classes and individual mentoring as well as a strong focus in lessons, had a positive influence on the results achieved by pupils in Years 9 and 11 in 2006. The early entry of many Year 8 pupils for their national tests in mathematics has raised aspirations and provided appropriate challenge for them.

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 their future performance – satisfactory progress, particularly in raising attainment levels in Years 9 and 11.

Personal development and well-being

The great majority of pupils behave satisfactorily around the school at lunchtimes and between lessons. The systems for handling behaviour are understood by most pupils and applied satisfactorily by many staff, although there still is too much inconsistency between staff and departments. The number of pupils who have to be removed from lessons is now monitored and the information given to tutors who follow it up with the pupils

concerned. It is too early to see how effective this system is because it is not yet possible to compare two sets of figures from the same period in the school year. Nevertheless the numbers involved at the beginning of this term are certainly lower than when the process began last Spring. As part of moving towards a consistent approach, the senior staff involved with student support have met and drawn up criteria for what represents good personal development at the school. This was introduced to staff in September. The number of fixed-term exclusions dropped significantly in spring term 2006 from its previous very high level but did not fall further in the summer term.

Although most pupils behave appropriately, in too many lessons a number of pupils, frequently boys, have poor skills of concentration and listening. They quickly lose interest, particularly if the lesson is unchallenging or dull, or if they are unclear about what they are expected to do. In such lessons, attitudes to learning are often poor. As a result, the learning and achievement of the class are inadequate as teachers have to stop the lesson to deal with misbehaviour. Some pupils come to school unprepared to learn. Conversely, some pupils want to do well and even if the lesson is unchallenging, will do their best to work hard and learn. In effective lessons, teachers set and enforce boundaries and the teaching engages pupils so they behave and are well-motivated. A large number of pupils lack confidence in their abilities and are often passive in class as a result.

Pupils are clear about the procedures to follow when they miss school as the systems for monitoring attendance have been strengthened. However, since the last visit, attendance has dropped. The provisional figures for the last academic year are a concern as they show attendance to be below that of the last three years.

The use of the daily period of community time is still inconsistent. Some of the lessons are lively, interesting and involve all pupils in the class. In others, the teacher lacks enthusiasm or knowledge and so pupils are not motivated. The planning for citizenship, one aspect of the community time, supports teachers well. A few younger pupils told inspectors that they are still worried about the behaviour in some of the mixed age tutor groups.

Progress on the area 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 – inadequate progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate. There is too much unsatisfactory teaching. Not enough lessons ensure that pupils make the good progress which is needed to make up for their history of underachievement.

Teachers' planning is generally satisfactory. Lessons usually start with the sharing of learning objectives which are effectively displayed on a board. Resources such as the interactive white boards are used satisfactorily. Introductions to lessons often recap satisfactorily on previous sessions which allow pupils to revise and link their previous learning with the new work. However, basic skills are not adequately taught. Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are not well developed and this holds their learning back in other subjects. The use of assessment is underdeveloped in lessons. Teachers' questioning is not effectively targeted throughout the lesson to assess how much pupils have understood so as to adapt the teaching accordingly. The ends of lessons are not used adequately to evaluate what pupils have learnt and to extend their understanding further.

The best teaching uses methods which make learning more memorable. For example, pupils made a small working model in a science lesson and this enabled them to learn about the materials used to make an electric motor. Teachers' questioning is used well to challenge pupils of all abilities. In an outstanding lesson the teacher was very enthusiastic about what was being taught. The teacher was particularly clear about how students learn and used discussion very effectively to deepen pupils' understanding. The pupils focused on how to get to the next level as a result of effective use of 'next step' guidance.

In less successful lessons teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils are listening to them when they speak to the whole class. This means that pupils are often unclear about what to do in the lesson and how their successes will be evaluated. Pupils are not sufficiently focused on what they are learning. Rewards and sanctions associated with managing behaviour are not used satisfactorily.

Members of staff receive a booklet with a list and basic information on every pupil in the school who has learning difficulties. However, one or two teaching assistants do not have a copy of the individual education programme for the pupil they are supporting nor do they have a copy of their learning targets for English and mathematics. Targets in individual learning plans are not measurable and few explain the strategies pupils could use to achieve them.

The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. Some good examples assess pupils' success against the learning intention well, inform pupils where they have been successful and tell them how to improve in the future. The lack of consistency in marking means that pupils do not receive regular information of this sort so they learn little about how to improve their work and attain higher levels of the National Curriculum.

The curriculum is being developed appropriately to offer more vocational courses. The use of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects is weak.

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 leadership and management of the school are not ensuring that improvements to the school's systems are having sufficient impact. There is insufficient systematic monitoring to check that policies are being carried out, and too little evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's work. This in turn limits the ability of the governing body to hold the school to account.

There have been some significant improvements in the school, for example in the provision of data about pupils' performance to teachers; pupils' knowledge of their targets in subjects and how well they are currently performing; and the training of teachers in lesson observations. The systems for the tracking of pupils' progress are improved. Teaching in English and science is better than that observed by inspectors during their previous inspection. However these improvements are not yet having sufficient impact on the work of the school. For example the good, concise data about pupils' academic history and future targets is still not used well enough to ensure that pupils are challenged and supported as much as they should be in lessons. This neutralises much of the good work done in giving pupils targets. It also makes it more difficult for tutors to fulfil their role of supporting and challenging pupils to overcome underachievement. Although there is a programme of lesson observations it does not place sufficient emphasis on how well pupils are learning and how the teaching brings this about. In some parts of the school lesson observations are frequent, in others much less so. The result is there is not sufficient shared knowledge of the overall strengths and weaknesses in teaching, so that concise, concerted actions can be taken

consistently to bring about improvement. The culture of improvement is not yet pervasive enough. The drive for higher standards is not bringing about a clear enough focus on learning. There is not sufficient attention being paid to basic issues such as pupils' literacy and numeracy in lessons.

The quality of work in the language department is not satisfactory. Earlier signs of improved GCSE results which would meet the department' targets in 2006 have not been realised, and there is too much inadequate teaching. It is however doing some good training in the use of interactive white boards in the school and is fulfilling its role in supporting the teaching of languages in primary schools.

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 – inadequate progress

External support

The local authority has provided significant support for the school, for example, in reviewing the transition arrangements of the primary pupils who move into Year 7, and in providing support for the modern foreign languages department. The school improvement partner has carried out training in leadership and management skills for the middle managers, which was well received though only a small number completed the training.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate

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

Priorities for further improvement

- Identify through monitoring common areas for improvement in teaching and implement rapidly a programme for improvement.
- Focus school improvement plans to give more specific actions for improving teaching and learning as well as a time frame for actions to be undertaken across the school, and ensure that the monitoring of their adoption and the evaluation of their effectiveness are both systematic and timely.

- Improve strategies for the behaviour management of lower achieving groups.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder
H M Inspector