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Ms Valerie Dennis
The Headteacher
Eastbrook Comprehensive School
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Dear Ms Dennis

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF EASTBROOK COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Susan Thomas-Pounce, Dr Cyndi Millband, Kiran Campbell-Platt and Liz Pike, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 21 and 22 February 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 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, groups of pupils, the school council, the chair of governors, representatives from the local authority (LA), the deputy and assistant headteachers, heads of year and other school staff.

Context

The new acting headteacher took up post in December. The post is a secondment in part funded through London Challenge.

Achievement and standards

The school has made good progress in developing systems for gathering and analysing information on how well students are doing, and teachers are making better use of it. Students spoken to during the monitoring visit were clear about their targets and what they needed to do to improve. The process for monitoring pupils' academic progress is secure and enabling the school to set challenging targets for improvement.

These systems are helping the school to focus interventions on the pupils who are not achieving as well as they should. Good use is being made of after school classes, booster material and coursework sessions. There is now mounting evidence that the challenging targets set will be achieved.

Staff are now better informed of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Teachers use the information collated in classroom management files effectively to help plan their lessons. However the grouping of pupils, particularly in Year 7, is not sufficiently well-matched to the available support staff. In some of these lessons, there are significant numbers with poor attitudes to learning which results in noisy classes, frequent disruptions and inadequate progress.

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

- Develop the process for monitoring pupils' academic progress so that they can be set challenging targets for improvement – good progress

Efficiency and effectiveness of the Sixth Form

Progress on the areas identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Ensure that post-16 provision adequately provides for the needs of students– this area has not been reported on at this visit.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour was inadequate at the last visit but good progress has been made in addressing the issues. Though there are still weaknesses in some lessons, teachers are applying the newly introduced behaviour management strategies consistently and are using the on-call support staff effectively. Lunch and break times are now much calmer and movement around the school is orderly. There is still room for improvement because there are areas within the school which remain unsupervised.

Many students talk of an improvement in behaviour. One pupil commented, 'It's a school that's improving but is still on shaky ground.' There are though, students who are not convinced that there has been much change. This reflects the fact that, currently, too few students take responsibility for their own behaviour, for example when in classes taught by supply teachers, and therefore behaviour remains inadequate overall.

The school canteen now provides a better range of healthy food including jacket potatoes and pasta. Many students enjoy these choices although some students miss the less healthy options previously available. Too many students, particularly the older girls, did not participate in physical education (PE) lessons and physical fitness is not adequately promoted by the school.

Attendance improved last term to become close to the national average reflecting the better systems the school has adopted. It has dipped slightly this term but is adequate overall.

The school council and year forum is beginning to give the students a voice in the school. The students involved take their responsibilities seriously and their suggestions have been acted on. They now need to focus their attention on helping other students to take greater responsibility for their own behaviour.

Quality of provision

There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching which is at least satisfactory in most classes taken by the permanent teaching staff. The proportion of good and outstanding teaching has increased substantially. The coaching and mentoring programme is highly regarded by staff, and a clear and widely accepted school teaching and learning policy has been developed. There is an improved understanding of what makes a good lesson and the impact can be seen in much better planning and improved pupil response. The high turnover, however, has left too high a proportion of lessons covered by temporary staff and teaching is too often inadequate in these lessons.

The senior leadership team has an accurate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and recognises that whilst there is much that is good, the amount of inadequate teaching is still too high.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Many of the issues related to the curriculum, raised in the last inspection have been attended to swiftly and changes are being led very well by the senior team. The school has made notable strides to improve the physical environment. There is a growing understanding about the important links between the physical environment, students' pride in their

school and their achievements. Levels of vandalism have reduced significantly and there is a high level of commitment from staff to improving the learning environment. The quality of assemblies has improved significantly and the students are developing a greater sense of belonging to their school community.

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

- Provide a curriculum that is appropriate to pupils' needs and abilities and gives them more planned opportunities to develop spiritual and cultural awareness – good progress

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The very rapid progress that has been made since the last visit shows a strong capacity to improve. The very good leadership of the acting headteacher has galvanised staff into action and many of the weaknesses are being addressed quickly and effectively. The middle leadership have also shown a significant capacity to improve. Many staff give time to ensure that problems are resolved and this demonstrates a whole school commitment to improvement. Staff morale is high and everyone is seeking to improve. Although there remains more to do, the excellent self-evaluation prioritises suitable actions. The school knows what is required to continue to embed improvements and resolve the remaining difficulties. It is now timely to ensure a substantive headteacher is appointed to take the school forward.

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

- Increase the rigour of self-evaluation so that all managers understand how to use the information from monitoring to raise pupils' achievement – good progress

External support

The more open meetings between the school and the Local Authority have improved relationships and the quality of monitoring. Support for weaknesses has been forthcoming and the London Challenge programme has been particularly effective in improving the middle management. Rigorous performance management has been the cause in part of the high staff turnover and more external support is required to assist the school during this transition.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director for Education, Arts & Libraries, Barking and Dagenham.

Yours sincerely

Ann Berger
H M Inspector