



30 January 2007

Mr J Tippett  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Tippett

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

### Introduction

Following my visit with Brian Downes, Lynne Kauffman and Brian Oppenheim, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 16 and 17 January 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, senior staff, subject leaders, newly qualified teachers, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority.

### Context

An executive headteacher has been appointed to the school for 60 per cent of the week. He replaces the previous headteacher who resigned at the end of the autumn term. Four new teachers have joined the school this term, replacing four who left at the end of last term.

## Achievement and standards

Pupils' standards of work and the progress they make continue to be inadequate. The arrangements for monitoring pupils' performance have improved and are satisfactory. They indicate improving progress from girls. Boys' progress remains a problem and is being tackled through a range of strategies including the deployment of mentors to raise standards. These arrangements are not yet having sufficient impact on the progress pupils make and the standards they reach. In 42% of the lessons observed during this inspection, pupils' progress was good, but in 21% it was inadequate and in the remainder it was satisfactory. This position is not enough to remove the legacy of underachievement.

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 – inadequate progress.

## Personal development and well-being

The great majority of pupils continue to behave well both at break and lunchtimes and when moving about the school. More teachers now make effective use of the school's strategies for improving behaviour. Nevertheless, behaviour in lessons remains inconsistent between teachers and subject departments, and is highly dependent on the quality of teaching. Where pupils are interested and engaged in the lesson, they behave well. A significant minority of pupils continues to have an unsatisfactory attitude to work. This is shown, for example, in poor punctuality to lessons, lack of care over presentation of work and by being easily distracted from their work.

Attendance has improved very slightly as monitoring systems have developed, but the level of authorised and unauthorised absence remains well above average. The older pupils who are involved in the vocationally orientated 'alternative curriculum' provision attend well.

The 'internal exclusion system' is having an impact on reducing the high level of exclusions noted previously, but there is still a much higher rate of exclusion than is usual in schools.

The use of the daily period of community time to enhance pupils' personal development remains inconsistent and opportunities for learning are wasted in a number of lessons. Where teachers show a high level of commitment to this work, such as in a lesson about racism, pupils are involved in developing their own thoughts, citizenship skills, capacity to work with others and listen to a range of points of view.

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 remains inadequate. Of the 32 lessons observed, the proportion that was good was 42%, but in nearly 21% teaching was inadequate. Overall, the proportion that is satisfactory or inadequate is still far too high. As a result, there are inconsistencies in learning and too many pupils still make slow progress.

Lesson planning continues to be satisfactory and is improving. Improvements in the way teachers plan and structure activities mean that in more lessons pupils are engaged and enjoy their work. They are able to tackle new work, contribute to discussions and share ideas. In most lessons, learning objectives are written on the board. As a result, pupils understand what is expected of them and know what they have to do. There has been some improvement in the way data about pupils abilities are used to identify these learning objective. The result is that they are more accurately focused on what pupils should learn. However, teaching does not always concentrate enough on the more demanding objectives and this means that pupils are not challenged sufficiently.

There has been some improvement in the teaching of pupils' literacy skills. For example, teachers identify key words and display them on the board for pupils to use. Taking some pupils out of lessons for work on reading recovery is another example. However, for some pupils this means they lose some of their mathematics time. Progress in developing pupils' numeracy skills remains inadequate. The marking of pupils' work continues to be inconsistent and in some subjects too infrequent. As a result, pupils are not sufficiently aware of how they can improve their work and too many fail to do homework or complete their work.

In the best lessons there are clear expectations and the pace is brisk with teachers setting clear time constraints for activities. As a result, pupils are interested in their work, keen to do well and behave better. Assessment data is used well to set work for the different abilities in the class. Pupils in these lessons are challenged and make good progress with their learning. In one good lesson clear expectations and probing questions challenged pupils' thinking effectively. Pupils showed real interest in their work and developed good enquiry skills. One of the most significant characteristics of good lessons is that behaviour is managed effectively. The challenging activities and brisk pace ensure that pupils are motivated and interested.

In lessons that are less successful, activities lack challenge and do too little to motivate and engage pupils in learning. As a result, pupils' behaviour deteriorates and teachers struggle to maintain pupils' focus on learning. Often, time is not used effectively. In plenary sessions, for example, teachers leave too little time to check what has been learnt. In these lessons questioning is not sufficiently probing to really get to the heart of what pupils have learnt.

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 sufficient progress – inadequate progress.

### Leadership and management

The schools' senior leaders have reviewed the approach taken to improving the school and have initiated some well-judged changes. 'Short notice reviews' for teaching departments, which include lesson observations, scrutinies of pupils' work and analyses of pupils' performance data have been instituted. This is a recent development. Its impact cannot yet be judged but it represents a clear and systematic approach to evaluating the work of the school.

There is still too much inconsistency in the school, which the school's monitoring and follow up actions are slow to identify and correct. Where there is good teaching and learning, there is not sufficient sharing of good practice. Although teaching is strengthening to a limited extent, the effect of good teaching is compromised by that which is inadequate or only satisfactory, and by the common occurrence of lessons ending well before the end of school. The curriculum has weaknesses, such as the way in which some community lessons are used. The opportunity to help pupils to

compensate for previous underachievement whilst taken in some is counterbalanced by time wasted in others.

Work undertaken to improve teaching where weaknesses are identified is thorough. It now includes a detailed analysis of teachers' strengths and those areas where improvement is needed. This has resulted in some improvement, but its effectiveness is reduced by the phenomenon of teachers sometimes improving whilst being supported, but not sustaining the improvements when the support is removed. The monitoring of lessons by subject leaders and others is not frequent or well enough targeted to minimise the risk of this occurring. Nor does it consistently enough identify areas of weakness in teaching, including the setting of homework, the marking of pupils' books, the presentation of pupils' work as well as the attitudes of pupils to their work. As a result, there is too much variation in the quality of education offered by different parts of the school. The present lack of information about the quality of teaching made available to the senior leaders of the school exacerbates this because they are not aware of who they should be monitoring.

The degree of support for teaching is also too variable. In the English department, for example, there is good support for teachers with the provision of detailed schemes of work. There are also detailed analyses of pupils' strengths and weaknesses so that teaching approaches can be modified where necessary. In addition seating plans for pupils are produced. Support of this quality is absent from some parts of the school.

Governors remain supportive of the school, but are still not holding it adequately to account. Although governors attend some of the local authority's training events, there are some important areas where governors do not have sufficient expertise, for example about school performance data and a good understanding of how to hold the school's leaders to account.

The senior leaders have made positive use of the recommendations from the previous two monitoring visits to create a focused action plan with clear criteria for success and a five point scale to evaluate improvement. The plan does not specify when actions should be undertaken and completed, so fails to provide a challenging rate of change.

The teaching of modern foreign languages remains an area of weakness.

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 continues to provide support, for example to the English department for analysis of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in the Year 9 tests. The design and technology department has benefited from local authority support in standardising the levelling of students' work to help drive progress forward. However, its officers have found it difficult to meet with some members of staff to review and reshape the support it provides.

#### 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.

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