

21 March 2007

Mr S Peacey  
Mark Rutherford Upper School and Community College  
Wentworth Drive  
Bedford  
MK41 8PX

Dear Mr Peacey

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF MARK RUTHERFORD UPPER SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### Introduction

Following my visit with Jennifer Brown HMI, Kenneth Thomas, Brian Downes and Ian Naylor Additional Inspectors to your school on 13 and 14 March 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 February 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, nominated staff, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

In February 2007, the acting headteacher was successful in obtaining the post of permanent headteacher at the school. However, he remains headteacher of a local middle school as well. Negotiations are underway to try to secure his full time services from Easter, and if not he will take up his post in the autumn term. The school maintains its relationship with a Leading Edge school in Cambridgeshire, and the deputy headteacher, seconded from there, will remain at least until the end of the summer term. Sixteen teaching vacancies will exist in the summer term due to retirement and promotion. At the moment, the school employs nine unqualified and nine supply teachers. The recruitment of suitably qualified, experienced teachers continues to be a challenge.

## Achievement and standards

The improvement in standards noted in the last visit is being sustained. This is because of continued improvement in teaching and learning as a result of careful monitoring and action to tackle any weaknesses. Systems for recording the progress of students are more fully embedded. A readily accessible database has been established that provides all staff with up-to-date information on students' progress towards their targets. This information is used well by senior managers and heads of department to monitor progress and identify and tackle underachievement. This monitoring shows that students currently in Year 9 are making satisfactory progress towards this year's challenging targets. It is also intended that the information should be used by teachers to set subject specific learning targets and to guide their day-to-day lesson planning. However, practice in this respect is inconsistent and this is inhibiting more rapid improvement in standards.

At the time of the last visit achievement in Key Stage 4 was mixed, with higher ability groups making better progress than lower ability groups. Current achievement is more consistent and students are making satisfactory progress towards the revised target of 52% of students achieving 5 or more A\* to C grades. This is because potential underachievement is being identified and tackled at a much earlier stage.

Students in the sixth form continue to make satisfactory progress. The vast majority are on track to achieve their targets.

### Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2006:

- Increase the students' achievement and raise standards by improving the quality of education provided – good progress.

## Personal development and well-being

Good progress has been maintained in sustaining students' attendance at a rate which is close to the national average. This is the result of the consistent application of the strategies to encourage better attendance put in place by senior leaders noted at the last visit. Particular emphasis by staff has been placed on rewarding students' attendance and on making clear to them the importance of good attendance on their overall achievements. The lateness of Year 11 students to school is being addressed through direct contact with parents. However, the general issue of punctuality of students to school and to lessons has not yet been resolved satisfactorily.

Behaviour is now good amongst the great majority of students, having improved considerably since the last visit. This is shown by the reduced numbers of students who receive fixed-term exclusions. The new behaviour policy has introduced a more consistent approach to the management of behaviour by staff. It provides new guidance on sanctions and gives better support to students in understanding that there is a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of inappropriate behaviour, including for those very few pupils who still show a tendency for low-level disruption.

Student welfare and support systems are becoming focussed in a more positive way so as to contribute to the improved approach of the school towards behaviour, general student attitudes to school and their social relationships. For example, students now say they find the behaviour of other students of all ages to be good, they feel confident and safe in school and take a pride in their achievements and in wearing their school uniform. Students in all year groups enjoy the celebration assemblies that mark their progress and the personal rewards that come from participating in community activities such as sporting activities and drama productions.

### Judgement

Progress in the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2006:

- Improve the students' rate of attendance- good progress.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning continue to improve. Nevertheless, there remains a substantial minority of inadequate teaching mostly where supply teachers are taking the lessons. As at the time of the previous monitoring visit, the majority of inadequate teaching and learning is in Year 9. The school continues to make effective use of lesson observations to ensure good professional development and to improve under performing subjects and teachers. The management of students' behaviour in lessons has shown a considerable improvement. The quality of marking of students' work remains inconsistent particularly in giving them advice about how they can improve their work. Students continue to report that some overseas trained teachers are difficult to understand.

In most lessons, teaching and learning are effective, lessons move at brisk pace and the work presents a good challenge for students. In these lessons teachers constantly check students' learning to ensure that they make good progress. Teachers are making good use of assessment to ensure that the work provided meets the individual needs of all the students.

In lessons that are less effective the work lacks interest and challenge. As result, students often become restless and inattentive with an adverse effect on progress. Teachers are not always prompt to lessons and are therefore not in a position to challenge students' lateness.

The curriculum is being further improved with a broader range of courses on offer. Tutor time is not always used effectively to ensure students are well prepared for learning and have a productive start to the day. Although the vertical tutor group system is appreciated by young students it is not meeting the needs of older students, particularly those in the sixth form.

### Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection since the last monitoring visit in December 2006:

- Raise the quality of teaching to ensure that all students are engaged in learning- good progress.

### Leadership and management

Since December, the headteacher has consolidated a team of able and supportive senior leaders. This team is creating a calm and hard working ethos across the school which both staff and students appreciate. Systems are rigorous and efficiently administered. The revamping of the behaviour policy has had a good effect and very little poor behaviour was seen on this visit.

Good progress has been made in developing the strategic leadership of heads of department and pastoral heads through the Working in Schools Extensively (WISE) project. Linked to this, each department and Year Head has been required to produce a raising achievement plan indicating exactly what is being done to prevent underachievement and raise standards. As a result department heads are more directly accountable for performance and this is having a positive impact on the quality of provision and standards. However, the quality of feedback, marking and the setting of subject specific targets is still inconsistent across the school. The new systems have not yet been used to monitor the progress of minority ethnic groups. The staying on rate into sixth form has improved, but the improvement seen in the strategic leadership offered by Heads of Year has yet to be seen in the sixth form

The Governing Body is working in a much more systematic and well organised manner. For example, the school improvement group is closely involved in monitoring progress, and is beginning to challenge and to hold the school to account. The financial deficit is being effectively managed with the support of the LA.

The completion of a formal school self-evaluation (SEF) is on-going, and departments have undertaken their own evaluations which will feed into the whole-school document. Producing a whole school SEF and the completion of a 3 year school development plan are now urgent tasks. The school's evaluation of progress since the last visit and an analysis of what remains to be done are self-critical, accurate and honest. The present leadership has identified appropriate priorities for future development such as becoming a high performing school and gaining specialist college status. The provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities has been enhanced significantly since the last visit. The Special Educational Needs Action Plan has already had a marked effect in addressing areas identified as needing revision. There is now more effective use of the skills and talents of teaching assistants to help prepare individual education plans and to deliver teaching programmes for literacy. A new role of head of inclusive learning has been created to give a wider perspective to the coordination of support for all students identified as requiring alternative curriculum provision. The unit for autism and the learning support centre give good support to students.

The leadership team now has sufficient stability and dynamism to bring about good improvement at the school. However, there are still staffing and recruitment difficulties which need to be overcome.

### Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2006:

- Increase the rigour of leadership and management by more timely and focused improvement planning, and more effective quality assurance monitoring and evaluation of departments—good progress.

### External Support

Local authority consultant support has been well co-ordinated and responsive to the needs of the school. It has had a positive impact. The LA has given the school some help with recruitment and allowed a licensed budget deficit for the next 5 years.

### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures— good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Up to 5 more newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards at Key Stage 4, by providing good quality feedback and subject specific targets across all subject areas.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring all teachers, supply cover and visitors conform to the quality standards and expectations set out by the school for lessons.
- Improve the punctuality of staff and students.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Bedfordshire.

Yours sincerely



Margaret Jones  
H M Inspector