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5 October 2007

Mr M Smith  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Smith

#### SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SHEREDES SCHOOL

Following my visit with Ian Seath HMI and Alan Brewerton, Kevin Corrigan, Sarah McDermott, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 26/27 September 2007, 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 March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Children, schools and families for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

David Jones  
H M Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF SHEREDES SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 26 – 27 September 2007.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of governors, a representative from the LA and representatives of the partnership school.

### Context

The LA negotiated a partnership agreement with a neighbouring high performing secondary school soon after the last inspection; this arrangement provides professional support and guidance at all levels. Through this vehicle the LA authority has agreed to enhance the provision of advanced skills teachers in the school. Two experienced governors from the partner school have joined the school's governing body. A national advertisement has been placed for a deputy headteacher. National strategies intervention support has been negotiated with the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

### Achievement and standards

The unvalidated outcomes of the 2007 Key Stage 3 national tests remain below local and national averages. Standards at Key Stage 4 are similarly below the county and national figures. The percentage of pupils obtaining 5A\*-C grades at GCSE is in line with the national average, continuing the trend of improvement evident in recent years. However, the proportion of pupils who obtained 5A\*-C grades at GCSE that included English and mathematics is well below average. The proportion of higher grade passes obtained in English has declined steadily for the last three years. Results in mathematics have shown an upward trend over the same period but from a very low base.

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is considerably lower than the national average, reflecting the school's previous results at Key Stage 4. Achievement in the sixth form is inconsistent within subjects and when individual performance is measured by average points scored. Performance at GCE A level and at AS level declined in comparison with the outcomes of the 2006 examinations. A more comprehensive analysis of the 2007 results will be included in the next monitoring letter when value added comparators are likely to be available nationally.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Raise standards of attainment and achievement by increasing the academic challenge and engagement provided where outcomes are low – inadequate progress.

## Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of the pupils remain satisfactory. They are proud of their new school uniform and parents have commented very positively on the impact this has had on their children's attitude to school. Behaviour is satisfactory and often good in public areas. Pupils move around the school sensibly and get on well with each other. However, attitudes to learning are still variable in lessons where the quality of teaching fails to provide sufficient challenge and engagement. On these occasions pupils are lacklustre and do not exert themselves; time off-task leads to immature behaviour and attention seeking.

Overall, the management of behaviour has improved; a lower number of pupils are being removed from lessons to the inclusion room, where the tasks provided are more meaningful than previously. However, there is a small number of pupils who persistently fail to comply with the school's behavioural protocols. Attendance was below average last year; however, there is a pleasing upturn in the first few weeks of this term. Punctuality to school in the morning is unsatisfactory. Large numbers of pupils were noted as late on both days of this inspection. When questioned they saw little point in the often aimless daily tutorial sessions. This is a waste of valuable learning time.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. Nearly fifty lessons were observed; 6% were outstanding, 35% were good, 43% were satisfactory and 16% were inadequate. The proportion of satisfactory and inadequate lessons remains too high to raise standards as rapidly as is required. Nevertheless, in the more effective lessons improvements are evident in the management of behaviour and the focus of learning. Steps have been taken to strengthen the quality of teaching by reducing the number of unqualified and temporary teachers, although the recruitment of well qualified and appropriately experienced teachers is still proving difficult.

In the more effective lessons pupils were appropriately challenged and engaged, lesson objectives were clear and planning satisfactory. Good, well-directed questions were used effectively to secure a teaching point and spark discussion. There is some imaginative teaching; for example, the re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings on the school hill, which fully engaged the pupils. They behaved well and made good progress.

Where teaching is weak, limited pace and low expectations lead to a lack of pupil interest, inattention and misbehaviour. There is insufficient questioning or other methods of evaluation to identify what pupils know and understand. Lesson planning is often weak and teachers fail to match work to pupils' abilities. The quality of marking varies considerably and too many opportunities are missed to provide pupils with guidance on how to improve; some is cursory or non-existent.

The 'Learning Support Unit' provides good support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils joining the school who have learning difficulties or who are struggling to learn English are provided with increased support in literacy. The unit

also caters well for reintegrating pupils who have been excluded and for those who have difficulties in coping with normal school life.

The sixth form was judged satisfactory at the last inspection. Issues identified were a lack of discrete study areas, insufficient academic mentoring and limited progress from GCSE. The school has begun to address some of these issues by: the provision of separate GCSE retake classes in the core subjects and an increase in academic tutor support. There is significantly improved accommodation for private study and ICT based research and the instigation of new target setting and tracking procedures. At this early point in the school year none of these changes have, as yet, had a measurable effect, although pupils talk readily of improved facilities. Results remain significantly below the national figures.

Although the use of assessment to track the progress of pupils against test and examination targets is in place, few pupils are familiar with their targets and they rarely know what they have to do to improve. Teachers do understand the need to set lesson objectives and these are invariably shared with pupils. However, few teachers extend this preparatory work to setting objectives and learning outcomes across the range of abilities and objectives are often confused with tasks.

The use of both open, and differentiated, targeted questioning is a strength in many subject areas. All pupils have targets to achieve but many do not yet know them. In addition, there are still too few examples of marking which clearly states what pupils need to do to improve. All staff receive appropriate data on pupil performance, progress, learning styles and targets. However, the use of this data, and assessment and progress information gathered during lessons, is not consistent in guiding future lesson and curriculum planning. Good practice in academic mentoring exists in the most effective departments; however, this is inconsistent across subjects and was rare in the tutorial sessions visited.

There was little explicit, differentiated planning for the ranges of ability in any class. However, there is good practice in some subjects such as PE and drama where teachers routinely look at outcomes where 'all, most and some' are used to define the progress pupils are expected to make. Peer assessment is also routinely used to assess, define and improve performance, in these subjects and in dance, where pupils understand precisely what they need to do to achieve a pass, merit or distinction. The school is aware of the necessity to link assessment for learning with assessment of learning, ensuring in the latter case that learning and progress is explicitly checked on a regular basis and by a range of methods. A lesson plan which details what pupils will learn, how they will learn and how learning will be checked has now been revised by senior staff.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school to match that of the most successful departments – satisfactory progress.
- Improve the facilities for independent study in the sixth form – good progress.
- Bring the planned development of Assessment for Learning forward rapidly – just satisfactory progress.

## Leadership and management

Appropriate steps have been taken to reorganise and strengthen the management team. Financial management has improved and the school procedures now meet national requirements. Significant effort has been made to ensure the human resources protocols deployed by the school support the changes in staffing and organisation required for school improvement. Governance has improved. There is evidence of the governing body having the confidence to question the decisions of the leadership team and the local authority on the methodologies to be employed to improve provision. The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of two experienced governors from the partner school.

The school's evaluation of its progress since the last inspection is realistic. Significant effort has been made to improve the use of assessment within the school; however, more needs to be done to ensure that this information is used to inform teaching and to track pupils' progress. The school improvement plan is appropriate, giving suitable emphasis to improving provision and standards.

The quality of leadership at middle management level still remains too variable. The pockets of excellence are illuminated by the quality and consistency of their departmental provision; they show in sharp relief those departments where inconsistent practice remains a constraint on pupil outcomes.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- Remove the inconsistencies in the quality of middle management by mirroring the good practice found in successful departments – inadequate progress.
- Ensure that governors and senior managers address the improvements required with urgency and strategic vision – satisfactory progress.

## External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided for the school by the LA, the school improvement partner and the partnership school is good. The impact of the actions taken by this group has secured appropriate progress against the well planned LA statement of action.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Further refine assessment practice so that there is a common understanding of the use of data to enhance provision.
- Improve punctuality to school by providing a worthwhile experience during the morning tutorial session.