

31 January 2008

Mr M Smith  
Headteacher  
Sheredes School  
Cock Lane  
Hoddesdon  
Hertfordshire  
EN11 8JY

Dear Mr Smith

### SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SHEREDES SCHOOL

Following my visit with Cheryl Jackson, Nigel Cromey-Hawke and Cliff Blakemore Additional Inspectors, to your school on 22/23 January 2008, 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 March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

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  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF SHEREDES SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 23 January 2008.

### Evidence

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

### Context

The school has been successful in appointing; a new deputy head who is an English specialist, an assistant head - teaching and learning, a curriculum area leader for science. The local authority has supported the secondment of an assistant headteacher to assist with behaviour management and the development of teaching and learning during the spring term. The recently appointed deputy headteacher joined the inspection team for the first day of the inspection as the school's nominee to the inspection team.

### Achievement and standards

The outcomes of the 2007 public examinations and Year 9 national tests were reviewed in the previous monitoring letter. However, it is worth noting that in Key Stage 3, the proportion of average ability boys making adequate progress varied significantly between English and mathematics. This remains the current situation in these subjects.

At GCSE, the 2007 figures reveal that although a slow trend of improvement was maintained, key weaknesses were evident in English and Mathematics and a number of other subjects. Girls of all abilities performed better than their male counterparts. Two thirds of the pupils who underachieved in English were of average ability and the majority were boys. Almost all who underachieved in mathematics were of average or higher ability and two thirds of these were boys. Communication studies and drama achieved positive results. English literature, French and music results were close to the national average.

Evidence from the school's increasingly robust assessment database indicates that current trends at GCSE would be similar to the below average outcomes of previous years. The school is concerned with the current proportion of pupils likely to obtain five higher Grade GCSE that include English and mathematics; intervention strategies have been initiated through the partnership arrangements.

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 – overall, inadequate progress, however, the increasing proportion of challenging lessons is a positive feature.

## Personal development and well-being

The overall personal development and well being of the pupils remains satisfactory. Behaviour is satisfactory and sometimes good in the public areas of the school. Fixed term exclusions have dropped by 18% and there have been no permanent exclusions this academic year compared to the equivalent time in the previous school year.

In the better lessons seen pupils respond well to the challenge and variety of teaching and attitudes to learning are good. Similarly the use of 'On Call' has reduced by 20%; however, the school has been quick to note that the figures for Year 10 show an increase. This highlights the fact that within the school there are still some groups of pupils whose attitudes to learning are poor.

Where teaching is less effective pupils do not exert themselves and inattention leads to disruptive behaviour. Approximately 25% of lessons featured a lack of pupil engagement and/or inappropriate behaviour. The school's own evaluations support this view but it is pleasing to note that an increasing proportion of staff is prepared to challenge such behaviour.

Attendance was below average in 2006-07; however, the rising trend in the data has been consolidated and the school's figures are approaching the national average. Punctuality remains an issue and progress in this area is unsatisfactory. The school's processes only recorded a quarter of those arriving late on the first morning of the inspection. The current whole school registration and tutorial processes remain inappropriate for the ethos and engagement in learning that the school is seeking.

## Quality of provision

Inspectors visited 41 lessons and saw pupils at work in all departments. The proportion of outstanding teaching improved from 6% to 17% whilst the proportion of good or better teaching was higher than in the previous report, 41% to 49%. The proportion of inadequate lessons however, increased from 16% to 24%, and is now at the same, high level as at the time of the section 5 inspection.

The improvement in teaching and learning is particularly evident in the number of outstanding lessons. In these lessons teachers have high expectations of pupils' effort and achievement and they set rigorous targets for them to work to. As a result, pupils make good progress because teachers plan 'engaging' activities that are enjoyable and set an appropriate level of challenge. In a Year 11 drama lesson for example, pupils made rapid progress in understanding about character improvisation through 'role' play and focused discussion.

Pupils have a poor attitude to learning where teaching is ineffective. In these classrooms pupils are often late to the lessons where they meet unimaginative teaching that fails to engage their attention and staff are slow to challenge inappropriate behaviour. Although there are improvements in how teachers plan lessons, on too many occasions the learning needs of different abilities are not met.

As a result more able children do not achieve appropriately and weaker pupils do not always receive enough support.

In the joint lesson observations with inspectors, senior staff observed that groups of pupils often experienced significant variations in the quality of the lessons they attended. Pupils moved from stimulating and engaging learning to dull and uninspiring lessons where frustration and disengagement were the norm.

A review of the school's monitoring of teaching and learning confirms the progress made by some staff that have been supported by the partnership arrangements. In a number of cases, teaching grades were more positive than those awarded during this inspection; the school needs to establish a corporate view of what constitutes a satisfactory lesson.

The school has continued to make progress in setting up a workable system to assess and track group and individual pupils' progress. Senior managers are now able to use this information to make strategic decisions on the organisation of support provision. Teachers' understanding of data has been well supported by the a specialist consultant engaged by the school. Some departments and individuals make effective use of the data but much remains to be done to secure consistent practice.

The quality of learning support provided is very good. Pupils who have learning, emotional, social, physical or language difficulties know how they can receive help and this is of a high quality. This ensures that pupils who receive additional support are able to make good progress. Learning support staff are well trained and have a particularly flexible approach to their work. This allows them to work with disaffected pupils during one part of the school day, give good quality classroom support later on and then deal with sensitive issues that may well have arisen with 'school refusers' or those who find the normal school routine to be difficult.

Whilst the curriculum was satisfactory at the time of the March 2007 inspection, the school recognises that in order to achieve the improvement in academic outcomes it seeks it needs to revise the range of courses for pupils aged 14-19. Planning for new courses is an urgent matter if this school is to provide an appropriate standard of education in the near future.

The impact of change to sixth form provision and practice has yet to take effect. Whilst the school has addressed the need for a discrete study area equipped with computers and provided separate twilight classes for English and mathematics, there are still many areas of sixth form provision that the school acknowledges needs to be improved. The introduction of academic tutor support is embryonic. It is not provided to all pupils. Sixth form tutors on their own admission, although having time identified on their timetables, are only conducting mentoring meetings on a limited basis. Equally, the improvements made in tracking procedures have yet to make an impact on pupil progress.

Currently, sixth form staff miss too many opportunities to engage with these young people, particularly at the start of the school day. Sixth formers are tardy in their attitudes to punctuality to lessons. Staff need to be very clear with all year 12 and 13 pupils about what the agenda is for, and what constitutes private study. Pupils should be able to clearly link private study to development of their own academic progress.

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 – inadequate progress.
- Improve the facilities for independent study in the sixth form – satisfactory progress.
- Bring the planned development of Assessment for Learning forward rapidly – satisfactory progress.

### Leadership and management

The restructuring of the senior and middle management teams and the appointment of new staff to key posts has been a very positive development. In order to inject an inspectorial perspective into the discussions of this new group, the headteacher was invited to nominate one member of this new team to work alongside HMI. The deputy headteacher joined all discussions and conducted joint observations with each inspector; she was able to bring a sharp perspective on the variability of learning she observed, to the review of teaching and learning.

The school's evaluation of its progress since the last inspection continues to be realistic. As was previously reported, significant effort has been made to improve the use of assessment within the school. The data is now available electronically in a manageable and logical format. The interrogation of this data has allowed senior managers to highlight those groups of pupils and subject areas who are underachieving. However, more needs to be done to inform teaching and learning whilst ensuring senior staff and governors are able to hold subject leaders to account for underperformance. Key strategic judgements are pending on the structure of the school day, the development of academic monitoring and the extension of curriculum provision.

Governance continues to develop and the minutes of the governing body meetings indicate a growing capacity to hold the school to account. The joint observation of teaching was conducted with middle managers nominated by the headteacher; the young staff involved clearly understood how to evaluate a lesson but were reluctant to come to difficult decisions. Effective middle management in the performing arts, physical education and special educational needs has produced strong departments.

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 – satisfactory progress.
- Ensure that governors and senior managers address the improvements required with urgency and strategic vision – good progress.

### External support

The partnership arrangements with Dame Alice Owen School have produced effective support for classroom teachers and good strategic guidance for the school's senior management team. Some staff are making a more positive contribution to the school and there has been an important increase in the proportion of good and outstanding teaching. The proportion of inadequate teaching remains too high and governors need to consider the introduction of capability procedures. The school, the LA and the partnership school need to focus the support work on the priorities for improvement noted below.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Develop both the attitudes to and skills for independent learning in the sixth form.
- Ensure that academic mentoring is both a robust and meaningful process for all students.
- Adjust registration and tutorial arrangements to provide an appropriate start to the day that will support the ethos and engagement in learning the school is seeking.
- Complete the curriculum review required to provide a greater range of appropriate courses for a September 2008 start.