

12 May 2008

Mr M Smith  
Headteacher  
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Hertfordshire  
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Dear Mr Smith

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

Following my visit with Roderick Passant, Peter Lawley and Angela Cook Additional Inspectors, to your school on 30 April 2008, 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 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 – *good*.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

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 third monitoring inspection: 30 April -1 May 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and representatives from the local authority (LA). The headteacher was invited to nominate a member of the senior management team to work alongside the inspection team.

### Context

In addition to the new deputy headteacher and an assistant head responsible for teaching and learning who were appointed before Easter, the school has also been able to appoint faculty leaders for the following areas: science, technology, art and media; humanities; communications; physical education, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT); special educational needs and vocational education. A head of science and a head of English have been appointed and the school is currently advertising to strengthen leadership in mathematics.

### Achievement and standards

The school has developed a robust assessment management system that provides an accurate insight into pupil progress. Current teacher assessment for Year 9 would indicate that outcomes in English and science are likely to be similar to the 2007 results reported in the previous letter. Initial data for mathematics is more positive than the results achieved in 2007. The school's confidence in the proportion of pupils who may obtain five higher grade GCSE that include English and mathematics has increased, as the intervention strategies put in place with the partner school have taken effect. Current data would indicate that the school's aim to exceed the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 'Floor Targets' for the first time in 4 years is a possibility.

Staffing problems have affected a number of subject areas during the year resulting in inconsistencies in the quality of learning. However, senior managers have provided additional resources, organised targeted intervention, an 'Easter School' and secured the appointment of a number of new subject specialists, notably in English, mathematics and science.

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 – satisfactory progress.

## Personal development and well-being

The school's recent initiatives and strategies to improve the pupils' attitude to learning are beginning to have a positive impact. One outcome of the on-going work on behaviour management has been the absence of permanent exclusions. In 2007 there were three permanent exclusions in the spring term, compared with none during the same period in 2008. A comparison of the total number of days for which pupils have been excluded indicates a reduction of 35% in the spring term in 2007 against the same period the previous year. The number of Year 8 and Year 9 pupils excluded has been halved. The number of occasions pupils have been sent to the detention room during lessons has similarly been halved.

In some lessons, inspectors still found poor behaviour having a negative effect on learning, although they note this has decreased since the previous monitoring visit. Pupils concur with this, saying that 'behaviour has improved and there is very little peer bullying now.' However, they note inconsistencies in behaviour management that still need to be addressed. In many lessons pupils are eager to learn and their positive attitude to work is demonstrated by their willing engagement in the lesson activities.

Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors. They express their views articulately and thoughtfully. They believe that 'the system of rewards misses the hard-working group of pupils who do not cause any trouble', and they say that opportunities for gifted and talented pupils are limited.' They would also welcome greater opportunities to win academic trophies, thus providing a balance with the school's sporting achievement.

Although pupils are aware of the importance of making healthy choices when eating, they feel that there is an insufficient range of healthy options available at lunchtime.

Attendance has improved since 2006/07, but is still below the school's target. It was showing a rising trend in the autumn and spring terms, but the rate of improvement has not been maintained. In the previous monitoring letter HMI asked the school, as a matter of priority, to: adjust the registration and tutorial arrangements to provide an appropriate start to the day that would support the ethos and engagement in learning the school was seeking. Pupils perceive the strategies to support attendance and punctuality in the morning as effective. Although a change in the structure of the day has helped pupils to be more punctual 69 individuals from Years 7-11 were noted by inspectors to arrive late during the first 10 minutes of the second day of the inspection. Registration is not undertaken in all lessons, and class registers are not always up-to-date. Pupils do not always arrive punctually at lessons. The school plans to overcome these weaknesses by implementing electronic registration next term.

## Quality of provision

The school has now made satisfactory progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors observed 39 lessons; one was judged outstanding, 16 were

good, 17 were satisfactory and 5 were found to be inadequate. The proportion of good or better lessons has remained largely consistent although the number of lessons considered outstanding continues to fluctuate. The action taken to reduce ineffective teaching has been appropriate. The reduction in the number of inadequate lessons is a positive development, some of the recently appointed staff performed well. However, as yet the proportion of good or better teaching is not sufficient to secure the pupil progress and examination results the school desires.

In good lessons, teachers define objectives clearly at the start of the lesson, check that pupils understand them, and return to them frequently to ensure that a sense of direction and purpose is maintained. They use a variety of methods to engage pupils, extending and consolidating learning through whole class, group and paired activities, stimulated by clear explanations and personally-directed prompting and coaching to bring out the bests in individuals. Teachers are brisk but friendly in manner, and convey a sense of urgency and enthusiasm in their questioning, explanations and expectations so that pupils enjoy their work and are eager to work hard. In these lessons, teaching assistants provide valuable support for pupils who find it more difficult to learn, providing them with helpful explanations and encouragement.

Teachers have benefited from a new professional mentoring system, set up with valuable support from the partner school and a consultant. Recently appointed senior staff have developed a perceptive and comprehensive analysis of strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school.

Too many lessons remain satisfactory rather than good because the activities planned do not provide sufficient challenge or support to engage the pupils in the learning desired. In some lessons teachers too readily accept single word responses from pupils rather than seeking to develop a secure, topic specific sentence based response that would secure higher level understanding. Pupils note that staff readily adopt everyday language in well-meaning attempts to make concepts accessible; however, they feel that formally expressed plain English is more helpful.

In many of these lessons the use of time was not effective and inspectors found that pupil progress was inhibited by tasks that occupied rather than engaged the class. Less successful teachers are too accepting of well-behaved pupils who occupy themselves quietly, rather than drawing them into challenging and stimulating tasks designed to stretch their understanding and engage them actively.

In the weakest lessons teachers talk too much, and do not give pupils the opportunity to contribute. The problem is sometimes compounded when staff fail to notice and respond to obvious signs of boredom and disinterest.

Although the school has now established an effective system to monitor and record pupils' progress against their potential, not all teachers understand the significance of the data they hand to those who visit their lessons or how to use it to set pupils challenging targets, provide learners with feedback or adjust their teaching.

During the visit, senior managers were invited to review departmental marking procedures with HMI, the inconsistencies of style and rate of completion evident, supported the view expressed by pupils that the academic guidance they receive varies between subjects.

In the previous monitoring letter the school was asked to complete the curriculum review and provide a greater range of appropriate courses for a September 2008 start. This has been successfully completed and in association with the local consortium, the school will provide an extended range of courses in the new academic year. These will include the new diplomas, an enhanced range of vocational opportunities and where appropriate work-related learning. The school has experience and considerable expertise in the performing arts where the flexibility of approach, assessment strategies and the resultant active engagement of pupils that is associated with these courses, mean that they both popular and successful.

In the previous monitoring letter the school was asked to develop the sixth formers attitudes to and skills for independent learning. Students are clear that, 'things have tightened up.' Expectations of what is meant by private study and where it should take place are clear. Students have access to a small network room, the library and have a list of rooms, which are not in timetabled use. Visitors note the change in ethos and students' attitudes. Staff reports that there is a greater readiness by students to volunteer and support pupils and the school community. Students feel that tutors are keeping a close eye on their progress on a weekly basis and there are now regular periodic reviews of progress against target grades.

The sixth form students are expected to sign in if they arrive after registration. However, the school needs to be clear who are on site, of particular importance given the consortium curriculum arrangements and potential community involvement.

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 – satisfactory progress.

### Leadership and management

The restructured senior and middle management team is now in place and good mentoring procedures utilise the strength of the partnership arrangements. The headteacher was invited to nominate one member of this new team to work alongside HMI. The assistant headteacher responsible for teaching and learning joined all discussions and conducted joint observations with each inspector. Her

insight into the school's procedures proved useful and she was able to see first hand how the school's coaching programme needs to be refined to convert 'satisfactory' teaching to good practice. Good decisions have been made on the development of the curriculum. There is an emerging strength in the senior leadership team.

The school's evaluation of provision continues to be realistic. The quality of teaching has improved and the weaknesses in teaching identified during this inspection could be traced to issues identified as part of the schools self-evaluation. Further improvements have been made to the use of assessment data to inform management decisions. Class teachers have received an assessment profile for each class and many are now using this information to enhance learning. However, the information available in some subject areas reflects the inconsistencies in learning the pupils have experienced over time and the limited understanding some staff have of what constitutes appropriate progress. The strategic reorganisation of the school day has produced a more effective structure and the move to electronic registration is scheduled to begin a full scale trial in June. The development of academic monitoring and the consistent application of the school's marking procedures, so positive a feature in some departments, requires further development.

Governance continues to develop and members of the governing body were involved in a discussion on the school's contribution to community cohesion.

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 – good 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 continue to provide very effective support for all aspects of the school's development; mentoring and coaching is provided at all levels for new and existing staff. Targeted subject specific intervention has been provided for key groups. The reduction in the proportion of inadequate lessons has been a significant improvement but the focus of support needs to be refined in order to secure a greater proportion of good teaching.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure the new electronic registrations systems work before the end of the school year.