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24 June 2008

Mr John O'Donnell  
The Headteacher  
The Radcliffe School  
Aylesbury Street West  
Wolverton  
Milton Keynes  
MK12 5BT

Dear Mr O'Donnell

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE RADCLIFFE SCHOOL

Following my visit with Michael Merchant, Additional Inspector, Isobel Randall, Additional Inspector and Lynne Kauffman, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 June 2008, 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 January 2008. 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 subject to continued agreement by Ofsted.

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 Group Director for School Improvement and Planning for Milton Keynes.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm  
H M Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF THE RADCLIFFE SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 17 and 18 June 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders and managers, groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body and chair of the interim executive board, a representative from the local authority (LA) and the school improvement partner. A member of the inspection team observed a lesson with a deputy headteacher.

### Context

Since January 2008 the school has undertaken a significant restructuring of the teaching staff involving the loss of thirteen teaching posts. Capability procedures are being followed with some teachers to ensure that weaknesses in the quality of teaching are addressed appropriately. Senior staff roles are being redefined to address the imminent loss of two members of the leadership team. The local authority is seeking to appoint two interim leaders to support the leadership group from September. The governing body has been replaced by an Interim Executive Board. There is a new School Improvement Partner.

### Achievement and standards

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Increase the rate of progress made by students in their work – satisfactory

The school's tracking and assessment of students in Years 7 to 9 shows that the majority of students are meeting the demanding targets that have been set for them and are making satisfactory progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, however, are not meeting their targets in English in Years 8 and 9. The rate of progress made by students in Key Stage 4, though improving, is more limited than for Key Stage 3. School information shows that standards in Year 10 remain well below average, a similar picture to that seen at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2007. However, 42% of Year 10 students are on target to gain 5 or more GCSE A\*-C grades in 2009 which is slightly higher than that reached by students in 2007. There has been an improvement in the rate of progress students are making in mathematics and science. However, too many students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, Pakistani and White British students, still are not meeting their targets in English. In the sixth form, students are making slightly better progress towards attaining expected grades than in 2007. A clearer picture will emerge when the school has a new set of results for the 2008 summer examinations and tests.

### Personal development and well-being

Although not a focus for this visit, inspectors evaluated personal development and well-being to be satisfactory. Relationships continue to be good and the general

atmosphere is positive. The number of exclusions has been reduced further and attendance in the main school is satisfactory. Students report that behaviour has improved since the last inspection, when it was judged to be satisfactory.

## Quality of provision

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Improve the quality of teaching to eliminate inadequate lessons and increase the proportion of good lessons – satisfactory
- Ensure that the sixth-form curriculum and support meets the needs of students and enables them to achieve well – satisfactory

Since January 2008, there has been improvement in the proportion of satisfactory and good lessons, but some lessons are still inadequate, particularly in mathematics and science. There are early indications that refined lesson planning to match students' needs and more consistent monitoring of teaching and learning are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Outstanding practice, for example seen in PE and art, is being used as good practice to share across all subjects. The work of the curriculum team leaders and their line managers is focusing departments on accurate self-evaluation to identify strengths and areas for development. Active learning and the application of basic skills across all subjects is beginning to improve students' ability to think for themselves and take more responsibility for their own learning. Tracking students' development is embryonic and there are specific gaps in peer and self-assessment to aid target setting in some subjects. Not all teachers fully understand how to interrogate the assessment information so as to improve learning for all students in their classes. The quality of marking remains inconsistent.

In better lessons, there is appropriate challenge for all students through a well-planned range of activities that focus on improving learning. Students enjoy learning and one of them said 'I cannot wait to get to school in the morning and I hate holidays because there is no school and it's boring'. In these lessons, students behave well and their rate of progress is improving. More effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) enhances learning, but lack of ICT capacity limits flexibility in some courses.

In inadequate lessons, the starter often lacks the drive to challenge learners, expectations are low, pace slips and students lose interest. Some pupils said that when teachers talk too much and there is a lack of variety it is hard to keep interested in the work. The specific targeted support of teaching assistants and well-presented resources help students to make progress in small steps. However, some staff struggle with meeting the needs of the more able pupils in mixed ability groups.

Although sixth form data is not yet included in the new progress tracking system for the main school, leaders have introduced and are employing a means of identifying individuals and subject areas in the sixth form where action is required to improve standards and achievement. The curriculum for the present Year 11 entering Year 12 has a balance of vocational and academic courses, although there are constraints on free choice dictated by the necessity to offer viable groups. A balance between small

and large groups has been achieved in order to attain viability. The school is participating in local investigations of the means to broaden sixth form experience by collaborating in joint sixth form provision.

Arrangements for academic support for sixth formers have been strengthened by the allocation of time during two tutorials each week for discussion of individual progress. Subject teachers' reports are used to identify areas of strength and weakness, and to encourage students to discuss subject-specific means of improvement. These sessions complement well the sessions spent weekly dealing with whole sixth form issues and with vertically grouped tutor groups that give students responsibility for younger pupils. Students report that this pastoral responsibility has given them clear messages about the extent to which they are reaching their own targets and they feel more confident about their progress. Sixth formers also value clear messages given in many lessons about specific means of raising standards, feedback given on completed work and the constant monitoring of work rate. The impact of these measures is not yet clear although recent data indicate an improvement in standards in Year 12. Improvement in provision since the inspection is satisfactory. Attendance remains unacceptably low, however, and is a barrier to further progress.

### Leadership and management

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2008:

- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels by ensuring robust and accurate self-evaluation leading to actions that improve outcomes for students – satisfactory.

Since the inspection in January, school leaders, working in conjunction with the local authority (LA) and the school improvement partner, have worked with increasing determination to address the key issues for improvement. The school and department self-evaluation and action plans all focus clearly on making improvements to address the key weaknesses. There have been barriers to making swift progress, such as the need to restructure staffing and the senior leadership team, in the face of difficulties in recruiting suitably able and experienced leaders and managers. The LA has acknowledged this and is helping the school find suitable staff to undertake some important responsibilities in managing assessment information and leading some curriculum teams. These are not yet fully in place. The school agrees that these changes are urgent and will determine the rate of progress next term. Inspection interviews and discussions with current leaders indicate that there is leadership capacity within the school which is under-utilised at present and judicious delegation of responsibilities and more professional development for aspiring leaders is needed to support the school improvement drive. Consultants have worked effectively with the school to bring about improvements in students' progress in Key Stage 3 and some areas of Key Stage 4. The school has recently introduced more rigorous systems to collect and analyse information on students' progress and this has enabled it to see where underachievement exists and to intervene to support identified students appropriately. Not all teachers are yet able to use this information to support their students as effectively as possible. However, in subjects such as physical education, where the use of data has been in place for a little while, the rate of progress of students has markedly improved. Many middle

leaders are becoming increasingly confident at using such information to refine their intervention strategies and so improve achievement. Departmental self-evaluations indicate that assessment information is enabling teachers to set more challenging targets for students. The school acknowledges that there is some way to go before such procedures are embedded securely across the school but satisfactory progress has been made in this direction. The school action plan is sound and the proposed actions and timescales are specific with responsibilities clearly indicated. The governing body has been replaced by an Interim Executive Board which has good experience in holding schools to account. Its plans for driving school improvement in the immediate future are clear and well-focussed on the key issues.

### External support

The school is working more productively with a range of partners to improve outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning. LA consultants are working well with key departments to raise expectations and ensure that more rigorous approaches to raising standards and achievement are embedded in normal school practices. Links have been established with successful local schools in order to share good and outstanding practice with staff and leaders. These links are already having a positive effect on improving, for example, the use of assessment information to increase students' progress. The LA statement of action, though sound, needs to be monitored carefully so that planned improvements are in place at the earliest opportunity, such as recruiting suitable personnel for key leadership posts. The school improvement partner is beginning to help the school sharpen its analysis of results. The working relationship between the school improvement partner and the interim executive board needs to be clarified to avoid an overlap of roles. The timescale set for the school no longer to require special measures is realistic. There is clear acknowledgement by both the LA and the school that this will only occur when the school can demonstrate robustly its own capacity to sustain better provision and outcomes.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure all teachers rigorously interrogate assessment information and use it in all lessons to engage pupils actively in their own learning and enable them to achieve as well as they can.
- Use the expertise available, both external and internal, to improve the capacity of leaders at all levels to sustain school improvement.
- Improve attendance in the sixth form.