

7 July 2008

Mr John Atkins
Executive Principal
Welling School
Elsa Road
Welling
Kent
DA16 1LB

Dear Mr Atkins,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WELLING SCHOOL

Following my visit with Brian Evans, Barry Jones and Lynne Kauffman, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 24–25 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 the following qualifications:

- the school ensures appropriate and sustained mentoring and support, with particular attention to support in the science department
- provision for newly qualified teachers will be kept under review by the local authority (LA) adviser.

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 Bexley.

Yours sincerely



Patricia Metham
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF WELLING SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 24–25 June, 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, the interim headteacher, the chair of governors, the Deputy Director (Schools) for the local authority (LA), teachers and students.

Context

There have been substantial changes in management structure and staffing. The school is now led by an executive principal, who is a National Leader of Education (NLE), an interim headteacher and an almost entirely new senior leadership group. In all, 28 teachers will have been replaced by September 2008, with the most radical changes in underperforming departments such as science and information and communication technology (ICT). The governing body has been restructured, with a new chairman. The process to appoint a substantive headteacher has begun. The school is in the consultation phase of a move to Foundation and Trust status, linked with Kemnal and Debden Park schools for which Welling School's new executive principal is also executive principal. ICT resources have been significantly upgraded.

Achievement and standards

A comprehensive tracking system has been established to identify individual and group underperformance. This gives sharp focus to intensive intervention programmes for Years 9 to 11, and includes rigorous monitoring and strategies such as booster classes and mentoring, strongly supported by LA and London Education consultants. Current data indicate that most in Years 7 to 9 are making expected progress in English, although overall standards do not yet match national averages. Improvement has come from tailoring approaches to meet individual needs, ensuring that students understand what they must do to improve, and developing productive cross-curricular links with the visual arts to stimulate creative writing and strengthen literacy skills. More able students are making expected progress in mathematics; a significant proportion of the less able is not. Science continues as an area of concern, with few students making acceptable progress and standards remaining well below national levels. A new deputy head is now providing leadership in science, for example implementing new schemes of work and a database to ensure close tracking of progress, and a new head of department has been appointed. The department will be almost entirely re-staffed in September. It is too early to judge the impact of many of these changes.

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

- Raising standards across the school in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Although not identified as an area of concern in the previous report, the LA highlighted poor attendance and disruptive behaviour as barriers to effective teaching and learning. Since January 2008 attendance rates have risen sharply in response to more exacting and consistently applied systems to tackle unauthorised absence. A combination of mentoring and sanctions has significantly reduced the proportion of fixed term exclusions. The disruptive behaviour of a small minority remains an issue, especially in lower ability sets in Years 7 to 9 and where teaching lacks engagement and authority.

Quality of provision

Prompt and vigorous response to the unacceptably high proportion of inadequate teaching has included staffing changes in areas of weak teaching, revision of schemes of work, development of lesson-planning models to achieve greater consistency of practice, and rigorous monitoring. Further work is needed to support those who currently lack the necessary experience or the range of skills to engage and challenge all abilities. The inspectors saw examples of outstanding practice in visual and performance arts, but the standard of teaching and learning across the curriculum is uneven. There are disparities in the quality of lesson observations, in the implementation of sanctions and rewards and in the skill with which teachers balance praise with guidance on how to improve. Priority has been given to preparation for national examinations. Whilst an important part of students' education, this does not often enough encourage independent and creative learning. The impact of recent changes will not be clear until some weeks into the new school year.

Some improvements have been made to sixth form facilities and access to computers; more are planned for September. The head of sixth form is working with the librarian to extend opportunities and resources for independent study and access to the internet.

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

- Taking immediate steps to eradicate inadequate teaching and underachievement – satisfactory
- Improving facilities for private study and access to computers in the sixth form – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The new senior leadership and management group has shown enterprise and decisiveness in tackling key issues identified in the last inspection and in LA reports. By the end of this academic year, staffing changes will be in place to strengthen areas shown to have been consistently unsatisfactory. It is a tribute to the skill and carefulness of those leading this replacement that morale amongst remaining staff is high. Where immediate expertise was needed, managers and teachers have been seconded from the successful school with which Welling plans to acquire Trust status. This expertise includes strengths in data management, financial planning and whole-school leadership. In addition, full advantage has been taken of support

offered by the LA and London Education to accelerate student progress in key examination years, to model good practice in planning and teaching and to provide appropriate professional development. Essential structures and systems have been set up and important roles filled, with clear job specifications and lines of accountability.

The impact of some initiatives is untested, where key personnel are not yet in post or only very recently so, and where planned changes have yet to be implemented. The impact of other initiatives is uneven, in teaching and learning, for example. Governors, under confident and well-informed leadership from the new chairman, are better able to hold the school to account, using the more accurate and detailed information now provided. Attention is currently focused on the planned move to Foundation and Trust status and on the appointment of a substantive headteacher. There is to be further governor training after a review next term.

Development of the visual arts specialism is good, with photography a particular strength. There is increased take-up of arts subjects and externally moderated results show impressive improvement. Led with imagination and flair, visual arts are beginning to have a positive impact on some, but not yet all, areas of the curriculum. Productive links with primary schools and workshops for the wider community are raising the school's profile and providing a valuable local resource.

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

- Ensuring that leadership and management at all levels bring about the rapid improvements required – satisfactory
- Strengthening governance to ensure that the governing body holds the school to account for its performance effectively – satisfactory

External support

The LA's scheme of action is well structured and sets out clear, realistic success criteria. There is a constructive coherence between the LA's strategic plan and that of the school. The LA's target date for the school's move out of special measures is ambitious.

LA and London Education support has been timely and effective, involving consultancy, modelling of good practice, staff training and guidance in data management.

Priorities for further improvement

- To build on recent initiatives to raise standards, especially in mathematics and science
- To ensure that teaching consistently engages, challenges and supports students of all abilities
- To consolidate newly established strengths in leadership and management and ensure that the impact of initiatives to raise standards and improve teaching and learning are rigorously evaluated.