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Jane Herriman
Executive Principal
The Duston School
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Dear Mrs Herriman

**No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Duston School**

Following my visit to your academy on 21 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the academy.

## Evidence

The inspector considered evidence including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers have not taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

## Context

The Duston School is an academy and part of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). At the time of the inspection, the academy was consulting with parents on whether the school should remain with the AET. The school is large, with 1397 secondary age pupils. Nearly one-fifth of these pupils is from minority ethnic groups and around 13% of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion entitled to free school meals is broadly in line with the national average and includes around

380 pupils. Around 7% of pupils with special educational needs are supported at school action and a further 7% at school action plus, or with a statement. Until recently, the school operated a specialist resource provision for young people on the autistic spectrum and some pupils who were part of this provision remain at the school.

**Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Too many pupils are internally secluded or excluded from the school for fixed periods and too many are repeatedly experiencing these serious punishments. The proportion of the pupil population that is subject to one or more fixed-term exclusions each year has been well above the national average since 2011. It is already above last year's high level. Far too many pupils are excluded more than once. According to the school's records, more than ten pupils have been excluded on three or more separate occasions since the start of the school year in September. Senior leaders explain that 'the bar has been raised', but are unable to identify in what ways the triggers for these high-level punishments have changed. The school's strategies to support these pupils to improve their behaviour are not working.

Pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those who have been identified as having special needs are excluded at a much higher rate than others. Senior leaders have not devised effective ways to help these pupils, or for all others at risk of exclusion, in order to support them to improve their behaviour. The school's systems for tracking improvements in individuals' behaviour resulting from the interventions are not working.

Nevertheless, for some pupils, the support put in place has been beneficial. Some of these pupils identified the importance of particular relationships with supportive members of staff in helping them to manage their own behaviour.

Pupils are very conscious of the importance of doing well at school. Their behaviour around the school is generally amiable. Despite being crowded, the atmosphere at break-times in the café and restaurant is positive. Inspectors did not, however, observe the purposeful approach to learning and lessons that is the mark of excellent behaviour. For example, pupils did not uniformly arrive at lessons promptly. When challenged, different pupils explained that 'lots of pupils are late' and indicated that they did not feel that the school attached much importance to this.

Pupils indicated that bullying is not generally an issue in the school and that staff are swift to respond and helpful when concerns are raised. Many pupils assured inspectors that there are very few racist or homophobic incidents. This was borne out by the school's records and by the observations of inspectors.

In conversations, which took place both formally and informally, pupils' views as to whether behaviour in the school is good, or not, differed widely. Some exemplary behaviour was seen in lessons, particularly in those where pupils were studying GCSE courses. In far too many, however, small groups of pupils were observed lolling around, chatting to neighbours, and quietly 'larking about'. Teachers are not consistent in checking for and countering low-level disruptive behaviour, or minor infringements to the uniform policy.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Reduce the number of fixed term exclusions and internal seclusions and ensure that all pupils who are subject to these serious punishments are well supported so that they do not reoffend.
- Determine individual action plans and programmes to support those at risk of internal seclusion or exclusion to improve their behaviour.
- Gather and analyse data about incidents of unacceptable behaviour in order to identify pupils and groups of vulnerable pupils (such as those who are eligible for free school meals and those who have special needs) at risk of fixed term exclusion or internal seclusion and introduce measures to reduce their risk of exclusion.
- Ensure that all staff share high expectations of pupils' behaviour and punctuality and that they identify and challenge all behaviour which does not meet these expectations.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire, to the Secretary of State for Education, the CEO of Academies Enterprise Trust and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Ing
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

cc Ian Comfort CEO of Academies Enterprise Trust