

## Robert Clack School, Barking and Dagenham

Appointing Paul Grant as the headteacher of Robert Clack School was a bold move. The Head of Humanities at the school, he beat a field of deputy and existing headteachers to the job. Crucially, his department was a beacon of success in the midst of poor standards and atrocious behaviour. At the time, he describes the entrance to his department as 'like the Brandenburg Gate. When students crossed the line, everything changed'. It may have been a bold appointment, but it has certainly been a successful one. The school is now a calm, very positive environment, where students' examination results are considerably above average.

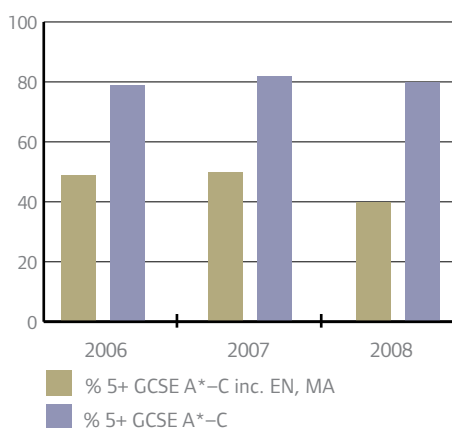
The school's reputation was at rock bottom, so the headteacher sent a very clear message that any problems would be dealt with. When a student was creating havoc at Barking Hospital, he went himself to sort it out. Concerned about the school's 70% attendance level, he drove the school minibus around Dagenham, looking for truants. He worked hard to deal with the worst behaviour and then turned his attention to the teaching. He has some very clear advice to new headteachers in similar circumstances: 'Make use of the honeymoon period. Use a crystal ball and tell the staff what's coming.' He gathered the staff together on day one and as well as offering support stated that routine lesson observation was now essential; the Robert Clack lesson was now

essential; tighter duties were essential, and so on. The weaker ones were moved on and he began to work with the others, forming links with initial teacher education providers to help recruitment.

For six months the headteacher did little apart from tour the site, visit classrooms, discipline students and see parents. While the school is now a calm and very pleasant environment, he never forgets (or lets others forget) that it was once very different. Nothing is left to chance and he works assiduously to protect the school's enormous gains.

He is very clear that, for the headteacher, making and sustaining this kind of improvement in these circumstances is extremely challenging, and that the job has to be a vocation. He has a very strong presence in the school, routinely walking into classrooms to talk to teachers and question students. He knows the staff and the students very well and interacts with them personally at every opportunity. They appreciate his presence around the school, because he takes the time to talk to them and get to know them. As one student said, 'He makes us feel special.' There is no doubt, however, that it also keeps students and staff on their toes.

### School data



2007 data		Student profile
Roll:	1,819	78% White British
Age:	11-18	7.3% Black African, British
CVA:	1,034	3.3% Other Black British
FSM:	30.00%	
Inspection judgements and quote (Dec. 2007)		
24	Outstanding	'Students make outstanding progress. The school strives and is ambitious for their success.'
2	Good	
0	Satisfactory	
0	Inadequate	