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29 November 2010

Mr J Grover
The Headteacher
Downsbrook Middle School
Dominion Road
Worthing
BN14 8GD

Dear Mr Grover

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of
Downsbrook Middle School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 November 2010, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to everyone who gave up their time to meet with me.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 November 2008, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' achievement is improving. Pupils' attainment in the Key Stage 2 national tests was low for a number of years, but improved in 2010 and was broadly average. There was a particular rise in pupils' attainment in English. These pupils made better overall progress from their starting points at the end of Key Stage 1 than the pupils who took tests in the previous three years, although their progress was still below average. Progress was better in English than in mathematics and higher ability pupils made less progress than others. The school's records demonstrate that pupils are increasingly making better progress as they move through the school. Learning and progress were at least satisfactory in all the lessons observed during the inspection and good in around half of the lessons seen.

Teaching is improving. It was good in around half of the lessons observed during the inspection and no inadequate teaching was seen. Teaching has many positive features. These include:

- teachers' high expectations for their pupils
- good classroom relationships and behaviour
- imaginative topics and contexts for lessons
- teachers' good use of questioning.

The school has established a number of common expectations for everyone's lessons. These include: pairing pupils as 'talk partners' to promote classroom discussion; varying classroom seating so that children get the opportunity to work with different pupils; asking pupils questions at random (rather than simply asking those with their hands up) so that everyone is involved in the lesson. These strategies are well established and used by all teachers. As a result, they help pupils to make better progress and enjoy their lessons more.

There are some general weaknesses in teaching across the school.

- Activities that pupils carry out on their own or in groups are not always well chosen. They are sometimes too hard or too easy, take too long to complete, or do not help pupils to learn what the teacher is trying to teach.
- When teachers plan their lessons they take some account of the needs of pupils of different ability, but this planning is often too general: they make limited use of information about individual pupils' targets and current attainment in their planning (and in their discussions with pupils during the lesson). This means that some pupils, particularly those of higher ability, are sometimes not fully challenged or stretched by the work.
- The quality of marking is variable. Some marking provides clear and very helpful advice to pupils about how to improve their work. At times, however, marking simply recognises pupils' good work or offers advice that is too vague to be helpful.

The headteacher provides clear and effective leadership. Much good work has been done to strengthen the effectiveness of all leaders and build the school's capacity for sustained improvement. The local authority provides effective support in this area, most notably by working with the wider leadership team (as a group and individually) to provide very useful training, support and coaching. Good work is being done to strengthen the effectiveness of the governing body. The chair of the governing body has a very clear understanding of the nature of effective governance and a clear vision for the governing body's development.

Leaders have an accurate and realistic understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses that is based on a good range of evidence from monitoring. Lessons are observed regularly by members of the leadership group and good work has been done to ensure that everyone's judgements about the quality of lessons are accurate and thorough. Observation records are detailed and give good advice to teachers about how to improve. The school now has better information about pupils' achievement which is collected at regular intervals throughout the year. Leaders make good use of this information to hold teachers to account for their pupils' progress and target additional help, support and advice to teachers and pupils where necessary. The school's development plan focuses on appropriate priorities, but in

places is not clear enough about the intended impact on pupils' achievement and development (and how leaders and the governing body will measure and evaluate success).

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2008.

- Improve standards, particularly of the more-able pupils and all pupils' skills in writing.
- Raise expectations and make better use of information on pupils' progress to set work which challenges every pupil to do their best and ensure they know how to improve their work.
- Build the capacity of all staff to monitor and lead developments within their areas of responsibility.