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20 October 2010

Mrs Graham
Headteacher
Mill Hill School
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Dear Mrs Graham

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Mill Hill School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 October 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors, the staff and students.

Since the previous inspection there have been considerable changes in staffing. There is a new head of faculty and a new head of science, and two new seconds of department in science and information and communication technology (ICT). In addition there are four new science teachers, three new English teachers and two new teachers of mathematics.

As a result of the inspection on 5 March 2009 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has improved since the last inspection, and in 2010 78% of students gained five A* to C grades at GCSE. The performance of boys and the more able has also improved: 78% of boys gained five A* to C grades, and 53% of both boys and girls gained five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Science has also improved. The school has become increasingly confident in setting and achieving challenging targets. It has correctly identified the lower attainment of girls and has put in place a range of strategies which have begun to successfully address this. Attainment on entry to Year 7 varies but is well below national expectations. The school's detailed analysis of its Key Stage 3 data demonstrates improved progress in Years 7 and 8. It has established

robust tracking systems. These are used to set challenging targets for each student, based on rigorous monitoring of their progress that leads to carefully matched interventions that ensure they remain on track.

Teaching and learning are improving, and an increasing number of lessons are good or better. This is because of a wide range of successful support which has helped teachers to improve their lesson planning. Lessons are more carefully matched to students' needs. In many, questioning is skilfully used to probe students' understanding of work. More able students are better challenged with work that stimulates and interests them. In some lessons teachers focus too much on the task they want students to complete rather than what they want them to learn. In most lessons students assess their own progress and understand how to improve their work. They enjoy the opportunities provided for independent working. In one lesson, students took responsibility for their own learning, as well as that of their peers, as they supported each other in developing football skills. Behaviour in lessons seen was exemplary, thus no time was wasted as students arrived for their next class or changed activities or groups. Temporary exclusions have dramatically fallen from 86 exclusions last autumn to eight so far this term. Attendance has also improved and is over 94% for the whole school. Persistent absence has started to decline.

The school's arts and media specialism is used productively to improve students' achievement and self-confidence, and permeates all aspects of school life. Students' artwork enhances the school site and school productions provide every student with the opportunity to participate.

Senior leaders and middle managers are increasingly confident in holding teachers to account through a well-planned system of monitoring. Senior leaders have an accurate view of strengths and areas for development. Good practice is identified and used well to help all staff improve through the school's coaching programme. This is effectively supported through the recently formed 'learning team' which has successfully developed the school's lesson planning format. In addition support from The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and other partners has been used to broaden teaching strategies. The governing body is now fully involved in monitoring and effectively holds the school to account. Thus the school now has a good capacity for further improvement.

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2009

- Raise students' achievement further, particularly in Years 7 to 9, focusing on boys and the more able.
- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that work is always well matched to students' abilities and building on the existing best practice.
- Develop students' skills in learning independently and in reviewing their own progress in relation to their targets.
- Embed new systems for monitoring and supporting students' progress so that the best practice in Year 11 is replicated across the school.