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Mr Ian O'Connor
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Dear Mr O'Connor

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Mellow Lane School

Thank you for the help which you, the Executive Principal, and the Chair of Governors gave when I inspected your school on 4 November 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please do extend my sincere thanks to the staff and the students visited by inspectors in lessons, and those we interviewed.

As a result of the inspection on 13–14 May 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 satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the last inspection, the school has undergone significant changes, resulting in the school federating with Rosedale College. The appointment of an Executive Principal and new governing body in January 2010 was followed by the resignation of the headteacher of Mellow Lane School in June 2010 and the appointment of a new headteacher in September 2010. The new leadership team inherited a serious budget deficit and an effective financial recovery plan is in now place.

In 2009, following inspection, GCSE results dipped significantly to well below national averages. The majority of students in Key Stage 4 underachieved, making inadequate progress in relation to their prior attainment and potential.

In the last six months, the Executive Principal has initiated appropriate changes to the curriculum, including BTEC courses, and restructured teaching and managerial



staffing to address shortcomings in the quality of teaching. While these have contributed to raising standards slightly in 2010, students' achievement was still inadequate with most students making more progress in English than in mathematics. There are significant gaps in attainment between students from different minority ethnic groups and those from different socio-economic backgrounds. White British students who are known to be eligible for free school meals did not achieve as well as Indian students. In response, the school has implemented staff training on a 'Narrowing the Gap' initiative.

In lessons observed by inspectors, the majority of students made satisfactory and better progress, but in a minority of lessons, particularly in mathematics and science, students' progress was inadequate. The school has developed more effective tracking systems this term. Underachieving students are now identified for interventions, such as one-to-one tuition. Target setting with students has commenced and learning targets are aspirational. The majority of students interviewed knew their targets, but were less sure of what they needed to do to attain these.

Most teachers do not use effectively information on students' prior attainment in planning learning tasks and activities so as to meet the full range of needs. Students generally demonstrate keen attitudes to learning. However, those of higher ability are not challenged sufficiently, nor do teachers and teaching assistants set high enough aspirations for students during activities. In a number of lessons, some students lack challenge or struggle to understand basic concepts critical to underpinning knowledge, or, for instance, are not developing the appropriate skills they need, including numeracy, language, literacy and critical thinking skills. Where assessment processes successfully underpin the planning of learning, students are challenged and well supported.

Although some better teaching and assessment was observed in English and French, most teaching observed by inspectors was satisfactory and a minority of teaching was judged inadequate. In most lessons, teachers did not consistently check what their students were learning before moving on to the next activity. Marking of students' work is inconsistent and, while there are some good examples of assessed work, teachers do not ensure that students have redrafted or corrected their work before moving on to the next stage of learning.

The school's specialist status in humanities has contributed to good assessment practices; these are beginning to be shared in mathematics and science.

A recently formed 'School Improvement Group', comprising heads of faculties, is steering through the school's priority of raising teaching standards and students' achievement. The internal lesson observation process is now more systematic, but lacks sufficient focus on students' learning and progress. Developmental aspects of improving teaching are not fully implemented; for instance, by sharing good practice cross-curriculum through peer observations.



Through a transition curriculum for Years 7 and 8, a sixth form common room and differentiated timetables, staff and students report there is now a calmer learning environment overall. However, students moving between lessons lack a code of conduct and some are too unruly. Persistent absence has been reduced and various initiatives have kept attendance broadly in line with national averages. Students in the sixth form report that they have a good range of responsibilities and roles in the school, and greatly value these, but opportunities for younger students are still developing and are satisfactory.

The school has been effectively supported by the local authority through its transition to federated status. Developing more effective communication with students and parents and carers on these associated changes is identified as a priority by the school.

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

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Sustain recent improvements in teaching and learning so that lessons are consistently good, to raise standards and the achievement of all students.
- Extend the opportunities for students to participate in out-of-lesson activities, take on posts of responsibility, and make a greater contribution to the life of the school.
- Improve the progress made by students, by building on recent improvements in attendance.