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Mr J Goodchild
Headteacher
Smithdon High School
Downs Road
Hunstanton
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Dear Mr Goodchild

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Smithdon High School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 January 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, governors and local authority representatives who helped me during my visit.

The school has made a number of changes in senior and middle management. A local authority adviser had already been seconded as an assistant headteacher just before the last inspection, charged with improving assessment, teaching and learning. Since then, a head of year has been added to the senior leadership team to take responsibility for improving the management of behaviour. In September 2010 the deputy headteacher took charge of the English department, to drive improvement in a subject where progress has been weak. At the same time, new heads of mathematics and science were appointed. In January 2011, the chair of governors resigned from the governing body. Arrangements are in hand for appointing her successor.

As a result of the inspection on 28 April 2010, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement. This judgement is based on changes made since September 2010. Attainment in Year 11 is higher than in the last two years, partly because of the improvements outlined below and partly because of higher prior attainment.

There was very little time for the school to improve matters between the inspection in April and the examination season in May and June. Indeed, the 2010 GCE results were lower than the school had been expecting. Students' attainment remained well below average and represented inadequate progress from their below average

starting points. Post-16 achievement was in line with the April inspection judgement of satisfactory.

During the remainder of the summer term the main focus for the school was to establish an effective senior and middle management team, as indicated above. The school has set itself higher targets this year. The leadership changes have brought a new sense of purpose and have enhanced the school's capacity for improvement. Senior leaders conduct regular tours of the school, dropping in on lessons and providing feedback on their findings. They provide a strong lead for heads of department, who now have a clear focus on improving teaching and learning and their accountability for students' progress. Each teacher now reflects in detail on one of their lessons each week and this provides a basis for departmental discussion. Behaviour management has improved and there are fewer serious incidents.

Following the unexpectedly weak GCSE results in 2010, the school realised that its forecasts had been based on over optimistic assessments. Subsequently, much effort has been devoted to securing accurate teacher assessments. Students now have more challenging targets and a realistic indication of their current levels in each subject. Those at risk of underachieving are being supported in various ways. Assessment information is collated to give senior staff an overview of the impact on whole school targets. However, the inaccuracy of assessment in previous years makes it difficult for the school to gauge current progress.

The school's own monitoring indicates that teaching is improving. As a result, fewer lessons are hampered by low level disruption. During the monitoring visit, the quality of teaching was satisfactory overall and good in three of the seventeen lessons observed. Behaviour in lessons and around the school was satisfactory. Lessons now have clearer aims and success criteria, so students know better what is expected of them. There has been some progress in making lessons more engaging but students are still too often assigned a passive role. There has been limited progress in planning lessons that meet the full range of students' needs.

Day to day marking has improved. In science and English, for example, teachers work together to scrutinise students' work, and this includes checks on marking. However, work scrutiny is not well established in all subjects and there are still subjects where marking is irregular or where sloppy work is tolerated. Assessment within lessons is still variable. As a result, students do not always have enough detailed information on how to improve their work.

Students have noticed a firmer line in behaviour management and an improvement in teaching, but comment that some weak practice remains. The findings of this inspection are consistent with the school's honest self-evaluation and with students' views. Senior leaders recognise that further action is needed to eliminate the remaining inconsistencies.

The school's specialist mathematics and computing status is reflected in the important role of information and communication technology qualifications in raising achievement. Changes in the mathematics department are beginning to reverse the recent decline in attainment.

The school has worked effectively with its school improvement partner and National Challenge adviser. The local authority has provided effective support in accordance with its statement of action, which meets the appropriate requirements. It has appointed an additional governor and provided training for governors. Consequently, the governing body now has a clearer focus on holding the school to account.

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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2010

- Improve the quality of learning across the school significantly and accelerate the rise in achievement, particularly for girls by:
 - planning lessons that meet the full range of students' needs and engage them actively in learning
 - using assessment information effectively to set sufficiently challenging targets
 - monitoring students' targets within lessons more frequently
 - ensuring support is in place to accelerate students' progress
 - ensuring students are clear about what they need to achieve within lessons and the quality of the work that is required
 - marking work more frequently and ensuring detailed feedback is provided on how students can improve further.
- Further develop the skills of middle managers to ensure good practice is shared across the school.
- Ensure consistency in the management of behaviour within lessons and around the school.