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Mrs Wendy Missons
The Principal
Frome Community College
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Dear Mrs Missons

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Frome Community College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 January 2011, 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 governors, teachers and students who spent time talking to me.

Since the last inspection, three new assistant principals have been appointed and a new chair of governors was elected in September 2010. There has been considerable change at curriculum team leader level with newly appointed leaders in physical education and information and communication technology, as well as temporary appointments in drama, art and design and geography. The number of students on roll has fallen from 1409 to 1371.

As a result of the inspection on 23 September 2009, the college 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 college has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

There is a clear commitment across the college to raising the achievement of students and this is seen in the work of leaders at all levels and staff. Achievement overall is satisfactory. However, changes in senior and curriculum leadership are ensuring that, despite a dip in 2009, attainment is improving securely to be broadly in line with the national average. The college's analysis of its most recent data, including results from early entries, shows that current Year 11 students are on track

to maintain this level of improvement and attainment is rising in the majority of subjects. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are achieving in line with their peers.

The college has worked hard to eradicate inadequate teaching and improve satisfactory teaching to higher levels. Since September 2010, all college staff have been fully engaged in a robust professional dialogue to develop a common set of principles for promoting effective learning. A good benchmark has thus been established. Students stated that where learning is active and teachers enable them to play a leading role in directing the learning, they are more engaged, enjoy their learning and make better progress. Students also appreciate the greater opportunities to develop the common suite of learning skills that the college has introduced this year. Training, coaching, lesson observations and regular curriculum team development time have succeeded in bringing discussions on teaching and impact on learning to the fore. Consequently, curriculum team leaders are more able to accurately identify strengths, weaknesses and points for improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and the use of assessment. The recent introduction of subject reviews and targeted raising attainment planning is enabling curriculum teams to develop a clear set of interventions. Early indications are that progress is accelerating. However, some curriculum teams have been slower than others to fully grasp the nettle of underachievement and this continues to be a key focus of the college's school improvement work. The college recognises that changes to practice are not fully embedded across the college and all leaders need to assure themselves that they have evidence of teachers consistently performing at a higher level. However, a good whole-school plan has been developed to drive further improvements.

The quality of teaching is still variable, but inspection evidence, examination performance and internal monitoring show an improving profile overall. Inspectors saw mostly satisfactory lessons and some good teaching. The best lessons provide opportunities for students to steer learning by developing ideas of their own or by learning independently of the teacher. Teachers use effective questioning to gauge students' understanding and, where necessary, re-shape explanations and offer high-quality verbal and written guidance about steps for improvement. However, these skills are not yet shared by all teachers. College leaders acknowledge that teaching is not consistently good in all curriculum areas because there is not always sufficient focus on learning outcomes. In some classes, over-long teacher explanations and/or questioning and dialogue that rarely 'delves deep' in order to check understanding inhibit opportunities for students to think for themselves and to develop and explain their ideas. Where teaching is less effective, progress is slowed, which results in variation in achievement within and across subjects.

Marking and assessment also vary in quality. There are clear expectations with regard to assessment and how it is used differently across the subjects to support and extend learning. As a result, marking and assessment have improved since the last inspection. Inspectors saw particularly good examples in English, art and

religious studies where students were actively involved in assessing their own progress and teachers provided precise subject-specific guidance which clearly identified the next learning steps. However, such good practice is not consistently in place across the curriculum. Although it is improving, students confirmed that, in some cases, guidance is not offered frequently enough or lacks detail and simply confirms that they have completed work or corrects what they have written.

The college has used its specialist status in media arts to develop curriculum provision and students have an increasingly wide range of related study options as they move through the college and into the sixth form. However, at GCSE level, the college is not consistently meeting its specialist targets across the required range of media arts subjects. The newly-appointed director of specialism is working well with curriculum team leaders to raise achievement in the specialist subjects.

The school has benefited from good support from the local authority, particularly through the work of the School Improvement Partner and consultants for the core subjects. The impact of this support has enabled the college to focus well on reducing variation within and across subjects and to develop new approaches to learning to raise achievement, especially in English and mathematics.

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

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Embed assessment practices in teaching and learning so that all teachers:
 - use assessment information to match learning opportunities to students' needs
 - evaluate students' progress in lessons and give them clear feedback about their next learning steps
 - help students develop the skills of self-assessment through regular opportunities to evaluate their work in lessons
 - provide students with opportunities to develop their independent learning skills through activities that actively engage them in their learning.
- Focus all curriculum team leaders on accelerating progress by ensuring:
 - consistency in the use of assessment information to track students' progress and challenge underperformance
 - that lessons are clearly focused on challenging learning outcomes for students.