

Serco Inspections  
Cedar House  
21 William Street  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham  
B15 1LH

**OFSTED**  
T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**SERCO**  
Direct T 0121 683 3888



10 February 2011

Mrs Abbott  
Headteacher  
Great Barr School  
Aldridge Road  
Birmingham  
B44 8NU

Dear Mrs Abbott

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Great Barr School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when my colleagues and I inspected your school on 9 February 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 students who took the time to talk to us, and to Chair of the Governing Body and the School Improvement Partner.

Since the last inspection staffing has been strengthened, particularly in mathematics, where a permanent head of department has been appointed. There has been some minor restructuring of the senior leadership team following a retirement.

As a result of the inspection on 24 November 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.

There have been modest gains in students' attainment since the last inspection but these have not kept pace with the national picture. In 2010 results in science, the school's specialist subject, were significantly above average. Current progress through the school is more promising and there are positive signs that students' achievement in Key Stage 3 is accelerating. The school's own data indicate further improvements and more students in the current Year 11 are on track to gain five A-C grades including English and mathematics. The school is acutely aware that these improvements are modest and progress needs to accelerate more sharply, especially in mathematics. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to make good progress because of the effective support they receive.

September 2010



The proportion of good teaching has increased. Teachers have more opportunities to share good and outstanding practice. One reason for this improving profile is that teachers are using assessment data more systematically to plan for the needs of individual students. In some lessons teachers use their plans effectively to adapt their teaching to meet all needs, but this is not consistent. Consequently the needs of the most and least able students are not always met. In better lessons students work in pairs or groups, and this helps them to develop independence and resilience. In these lessons, students develop a love of learning and they tackle tasks with energy and enthusiasm. In less effective lessons, tasks are too tightly directed by the teacher and students' pace of work slows. The feedback students get about their work has improved. Inspectors observed some good oral feedback that helped students identify precisely what the next steps in their learning should be, but this remains inconsistent, as does the quality of marking.

There have been improvements to students' attendance. The school has worked hard to help students and their parents and carers to appreciate the importance of regular attendance. The number of students who struggle to attend school regularly has reduced but remains higher than the national average.

The school's specialist status has been used well to spread good practice. A recent success was improving literacy skills in Year 7 through advanced skills teachers in science helping other teachers to use a 'language of learning' approach.

The school is building better capacity to sustain improvement by ensuring consistency in the work done by middle leaders. Heads of departments and key stage leaders regularly monitor the quality of lessons and take sound action to improve teaching. The school has been successful in implementing a robust programme of coaching and monitoring to eradicate inadequate teaching. The systems to move satisfactory teaching to good are also developing well. The impact of these improvements can be seen in the better progress in Key Stage 3 and the gains in attainment.

The support offered by the local authority and the school's improvement partner has been effective.

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

Joan Hewitt  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009**

- Improve achievement so that challenging attainment and progress targets, as agreed by the governing body, are met or exceeded in the present and subsequent academic years. This is to be done by:
  - effectively sharing good and outstanding practice
  - ensuring that the pace and challenge of lessons are sufficient to enable all students to make at least good progress.
  
- Improve the attendance of students to 93.0% by the end of the present academic year and to 93.5% by the end of the following year. Equally reduce the percentage of students who are persistently absent from school to 6.0% by the end of this academic year and to 5.5% by the end of the following academic year. Particular action should be taken to re-engage students who are persistently absent, through intensive monitoring and through making best use of support from other agencies.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of assessment by ensuring that:
  - there is consistency across subjects and key stages in the quality of feedback given to students so they know more clearly how to improve their work
  - information about students' progress is used more consistently so that lessons are better planned with individuals' different needs and starting points taken into account.