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9 December 2010

Mrs J Beacom  
Headteacher  
Barclay School  
Walkern Road  
Stevenage  
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Dear Mrs Beacom

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Barclay School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 December 2010, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also give my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body for the time he gave, and to the students with whom I spoke in a meeting, in lessons and around the school.

Since the last Ofsted inspection, an additional member of the senior leadership team has been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 29 April 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 **inadequate progress** in making improvements and **inadequate progress** in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Students' achievement is satisfactory, as it was at the time of the last inspection. In 2009, students' attainment in their GCSE examinations declined compared with the previous year, but recovered in 2010 to exceed that in 2008. In the GCSE examinations in 2010, students reached average standards and made satisfactory progress from their average starting points at aged 11. Attainment in English and mathematics was average and the proportion of students who were awarded five or more higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was also in line with the national average. Data from the school, which has been a reliable indicator in the recent past, show a further improvement for the current Year 11. The students who entered GCSE English literature in Year 10 performed better than the previous cohort in English, but in science Year 10 students' results were lower than those of the previous cohort.

September 2010



The tutorials now provide an accredited course. However, they are not capturing students' interest and too much time is wasted in them.

In lessons, the match of tasks to students' ability and previous learning remains underdeveloped. In the great majority of lessons observed, there was some planning for this. However, it was too frequently about what students would do, rather than what they would learn or how they would be supported. It revealed that teachers' expectations are frequently too vague, or inappropriately challenging. This is partly a result of imprecise learning objectives; these do not focus enough on what students should learn. Teaching does not sufficiently often ensure that there is adequate challenge for the more able and adequate support for those who find the work difficult. However, in one English lesson, the use of discussions in well-selected groups, the support materials and slightly amended tasks for different groups, provided a successful approach.

The use of data to track students' attainment and progress and set targets has developed well. It is used effectively to identify which students would benefit from more tuition. The responsibility for target-setting now lies increasingly with subject leaders and their teams, with oversight by senior leaders. Good use has been made of data in English to identify the skills that each student needs to develop and to arrange the necessary teaching. Informal evaluations suggest that this has been effective, and certainly Year 11 students' performance in English GCSE improved in 2010. However a rigorous evaluation has not been undertaken.

The school's evaluation of its work is now less reliant on senior leaders, being also undertaken by middle leaders. While evaluations highlight some relevant issues, the approach is neither sufficiently analytical nor well enough focused on students' learning. For example, observations of lessons still concentrate too much on what the teacher is doing rather than on students' learning. In departmental reviews there is too much emphasis on what departments provide rather than an analysis of its impact. As a result, department improvement plans generally lack detail, measurable targets and milestones. This makes it difficult to judge whether progress is sufficient or whether a different approach or more resources are needed. The school development plan is based more securely on areas that require improvement, though it too has insufficient measurable milestones and targets. While processes relevant to the capacity for sustained improvement show development since the last inspection, the rate of progress is too slow.

The school's specialist subjects have not achieved the targets set for GCSE performance. However, the relevant departments have been involved in piloting approaches to, for example, the use of students' targets, applying technology as a learning tool and establishing links with primary schools. These approaches are now used more widely in the school.

The school has complied with the requirements relating to the accounting of its finances.

The support from the local authority has been relevant to the school's needs, but has not always been sufficiently timely and has not resulted in sufficiently rapid 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

Alan Alder  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Complete the required financial assessment process as a matter of urgency.
- Improve standards and achievement by making better use of accredited courses in the significant curriculum time available for PSHE and tutorials.
- Enhance the match of tasks to the students' learning needs so that all lessons provide good learning opportunities across the range of abilities.
- Make consistent use of the recently developed pupil-tracking and target-setting system to inform teachers' planning and to enhance the students' learning.