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25 October 2010

Mr Harrison  
The Valley School  
Valley Way  
Stevenage  
SG2 9AB

Dear Mr Harrison

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of The Valley School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Friday 22 October 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussion and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please convey my thanks to the teachers and pupils whose lessons we jointly visited and who spoke to us about their work.

Since the inspection, the school has reviewed the make-up of its senior management team. As a result, the team has been extended to include additional members from the core subject leaders. The clear job descriptions include the roles of Key Stage Tutor 3 and 4 co-ordinators. This should enable the school to monitor more closely than previously the performance and progress of pupils across the curriculum. There have been on-going issues in recruiting well-qualified teachers and currently there are several staff whose status is either that of temporary supply or unqualified. The school roll has also decreased since the last inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 February 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.

The students' rate of progress remains at least satisfactory. Attainment is similar to that at the time of the last inspection. All pupils leave with some form of accreditation. A few are successful at GCSE, mainly gaining D to G grades, in English, mathematics and science. Results in information and communication technology are particularly strong with many students gaining the highest available entry levels. In art, in 2009, a number made very good progress to achieve B and

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grades at GCSE. The school is currently looking at a wider range of accreditation to match the pupils' needs and is trialling BTEC science in the first instance.

The school has been successful in improving the quality of teachers' planning. The re-formulated lesson plan, used by all staff on this visit, demonstrates clearly that staff are able to plan distinct learning outcomes. In the 15 part lessons visited, most staff had related their assessment strategies well to the intended learning. The school and local authority monitoring records show that the training to improve planning has had a positive outcome on the quality of teaching and that there is now a much higher proportion of good teaching than at the time of the last inspection.

Individual teacher's use of assessment information has improved in line with the improved planning. Staff have benefitted from support and training so that there is a generally good understanding of both National Curriculum and P-levels against which to measure the pupils' small steps in learning. This has translated well in some subjects into 'getting better at...' statements, pupil-friendly interpretations of levels. Marking of pupils' work continues to be encouraging to pupils and is gradually becoming more diagnostic and helpful in guiding them in improving work. Stepped targets are used regularly to help pupils meet their individual education plans. A system of rewards is closely linked with successfully meeting milestones on the way to achieving targets and is helping to further motivate pupils.

Other aspects of whole-school assessment procedures, however, are less well developed. Pupils' progress is recorded centrally on a termly basis but, in the interim, departmental records are not routinely collated or monitored by senior staff. The school recognises that its records of progress, although helpful when considering an individual pupil, do not clearly show the progress of cohorts or groups within a cohort. This makes it difficult for the school to have an overview of progress across the whole curriculum at frequent intervals.

The local authority has provided funding and training for the school. It has recently supported senior leaders in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. The latest available review document offers constructive advice and perceptive analysis of issues within the school. The school is working well with the local authority and taking on board its recommendations.

With the expansion of the senior leadership team, there is greater scope to concentrate on strategies to raise the expectations of pupils academically, whilst at the same time, sustaining their continuing good personal development.

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  
Sheila Nolan  
**Additional Inspector**

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## Annex

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

- Raise the level of lesson planning to ensure a firm link between sharply-focused objectives and effective learning.
- Develop assessment procedures that measure accurately and frequently students' small steps of progress in relation to learning objectives.
- Use effective assessment procedures to identify specific and relevant targets for each student.