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Mrs J Tridgell
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Dear Mrs Tridgell

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Nova Hreod

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Judith Goodchild, additional inspector, on 2 February 2011; for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, governors, students, and director of education of the local authority who spoke with us during our visit.

Since the last inspection, the faculty structure of the school has been reshaped and the roles and responsibilities of faculty leaders redefined. Provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has been reorganised so that students spend more time taught by subject teachers and less time withdrawn for separate provision. The governing body has a new chair, vice-chair and four new members.

As a result of the inspection on 14–15 October 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

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



Prior to the last inspection, attainment by the end of Year 11 rose strongly and moved close to average by 2009, which represented a considerable success for a school which two years previously had not reached the national minimum expectation. Overall GCSE results rose further in 2010 but by less than the national rate of improvement. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at Grade C or above including English and mathematics was below average. In 2010, as in previous years, too many students across the attainment range did not achieve the results they should, given their prior attainment.

This levelling of the school's previously steep trajectory of improvement in overall results was unanticipated, because improvements continue to be made in students' attitudes and readiness for learning. Students' attendance, for example, has risen markedly and is now above average, and rates of persistent absence have nearly halved over three years. Rates of exclusion have dropped very sharply as general behaviour has improved considerably. Although learning in lessons can be slowed occasionally by distractive behaviour, in the majority of lessons students learn well and apply themselves fully to their tasks.

The headteacher has demonstrated considerable vision in leading a significant restructuring of leadership and management at all levels in the school in order to achieve greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. These reforms have empowered faculty leaders to play a more effective role in monitoring and developing teaching in their subjects. The roles and responsibilities of leaders have been very clearly defined. Throughout the school, staff are held rigorously to account for the performance of students they teach or support through regular one-to-one meetings with their line managers. The faculty review system has become much more sharply focused on the key school improvement priorities of improving assessment for learning, providing students with activities matched to their capabilities, and developing students' personal learning and thinking skills. Each term, on rotation, the work of every faculty is scrutinised in detail in terms of its effectiveness in promoting one of these priorities. The reports arising from these reviews sharply identify the strengths and weaknesses of faculty performance against clear criteria, and faculties use dedicated meeting times to plan well-focused improvement strategies. The sharing of good practice between teachers is encouraged by this transparent review process, and by teachers leading sessions for their colleagues in a broad ranging programme of in-house courses to develop and share aspects of pedagogy.

A consequence of strengthening accountability for performance across the school has been greater consistency of effective practice in the classroom. Teachers now systematically identify the differing needs of groups of students in their classes when planning their lessons, and most identify strategies to involve all of these groups in learning. Teachers do not always sufficiently adapt the levels of challenge in activities to match students' capabilities, though, so that in a small minority of lessons work is too challenging for some or not challenging enough for others.



Teachers are using assessment information with increasing effect to identify what students can or cannot do and to plan activities which address areas for improvement. In most faculties there are excellent examples of the marking of students' work which sets out very specific next steps for raising performance.

As progress for students with special educational needs and or disabilities has been a weakness over a number of years, the school has restructured its provision. As a result, the work of the school is more sharply focused on meeting the needs of these students. The review of provision for these students has led to very clear information being sent to classroom teachers to help them plan for their needs. This is improving their progress, although in some lower-attaining sets there is insufficient additional adult support in lessons to manage students' varying needs.

Attainment in the specialist subject of information and communication technology improved markedly in 2010, and the proportion of students gaining two or more sciences at grades A* to C continued its strong improvement and exceeded its target. Mathematics attainment, however, fell back a little and did not meet its target. The specialism now has a wider impact on progress throughout the school than noted in the last inspection report. It makes a particularly strong contribution to the school's enrichment programme, and specialist themes permeate the curriculum.

The school's capacity to improve is developing well and yielding better outcomes in many areas, despite some marked unevenness in the rate of improvement of students' achievement. The school has welcomed the effective and regular scrutiny and flexible support of the local authority, National Challenge Advisor and School Improvement Partner in developing and refining its approaches and setting realistic targets for 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

Ian Hodgkinson

Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in 14–15 October 2009

- Further raise attainment in all subjects by embedding assessment practices so that all teachers:
 - provide students with activities that are well matched to their needs and capabilities, particularly the more able students
 - evaluate students' progress in lessons, and give them clear feedback about their next steps in learning.
- Reduce the variation in students' progress and attainment between subjects by:
 - ensuring that all middle leaders rigorously monitor students' progress and take effective action to tackle underperformance
 - sharing effective teaching and learning practice so that it is consistently good across the school.

