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Mr Matt Jennings
Headteacher
Copley High School
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Dear Mr Jennings

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Copley High School

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and your students gave when I inspected your school on 13 January 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

Since the school's last inspection, a new headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher were appointed in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection on September 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.

In 2010, attainment remained well below average at GCSE. There was an improvement in mathematics and a decline in English and science. Results were low in geography, technology and drama. In 2009, the progress made by Year 11 was exceptionally poor. Progress remained inadequate in 2010, especially in English and mathematics, and all groups significantly underachieved.

However, the school has reliable evidence to show that achievement has recently begun to improve. Students in the current Year 11 are making better progress in English, mathematics and science. The proportion that gained at least a C grade in English in the early entry exams for 2011 is higher than the previous year. Interim

September 2010



grades from externally assessed modules show that the school is on track to improve GCSE results in mathematics and science. The decline in the number gaining two GCSEs in science was due to the lack of curriculum options. The introduction of single sciences and BTEC science has greatly increased the take-up of two sciences in Year 10. The poor results in geography have been tackled by improved management of the GCSE course and the school reliably predicts a significant improvement in 2011. More students are taking eight GCSEs and Year 11 students are making better progress in the new physical education and performing arts courses.

Learning has improved in lessons. Students are enjoying lessons more and making better progress because low-level disruption has been greatly reduced. Students are taking more initiative, working more independently, asking more questions and contributing more, but this is not consistent in all lessons. They know their targets, which are higher than in the past and they are regularly assessed to show their progress which gives them increased motivation and direction.

There has been a great improvement in attendance from low to above average. Persistent absence by students has reduced considerably and is leading to improved achievement. Attendance has continued to improve in the current school year. This sustained and significant improvement has been brought about by the strong partnership between a new education welfare officer and the school attendance officers who have been given additional time to make regular home visits. Staff have intervened earlier to prevent attendance becoming a problem. The monitoring of attendance is more rigorous in school and in lessons. Exclusions have been reduced which has also contributed to improved attendance.

The quality of teaching has improved. Recently introduced policies for behaviour and rewards have been successful in improving the context for learning in classrooms and in motivating students to engage. Teachers are finding it easier to teach and students are finding it easier to learn. Teachers are making better and more consistent use of lesson objectives. They are talking less and they are planning a greater variety of activities in lessons, including pair and group work. More use is being made of peer and self-assessment by students. The use of questions to promote classroom dialogue and focus learning has improved. The use of assessment criteria to specify the skills to be learnt is developing. The consistency of marking has begun to improve with the recent introduction of a new system for written praise and feedback. The mathematics and computing specialism has improved the use of information technology resources in teaching. As a result of these improvements, students at all levels of ability are making better progress.

Following an extensive audit the school has introduced the teaching of literacy and accelerated reading in tutor group time. Observed sessions were purposeful and engaging and early evaluation indicates improved reading scores in Year 8. Discussion with students indicated that some, but not all, find the tutor group sessions useful. Whole-staff training has promoted the use of key words and phrases in all subjects. Progress on literacy development has slowed due to staff absence.

The new senior leadership team has been in place for one term. Staff morale has improved significantly and staff are positive about the changes that are being brought about. Staff surveys show much higher levels of satisfaction with the communication by senior management and with the policies on behaviour management. Students are also more positive about the school, especially the new behaviour and rewards systems. Target-setting is more ambitious and progress against targets is monitored with increased rigour in all years and subjects. The quality of self-evaluation is improving with greater use of data. However, the quality of analysis is inconsistent across departments and some school judgements are not linked sufficiently rigorously to the evidence of the impact on student outcomes. The training and development of staff has played a key part in the improvement of teaching and learning. New teaching and learning groups have recently begun to meet and are contributing to the strongly improving culture of learning and improvement. The headteacher has effectively communicated his vision of higher expectations of students and staff. Actions are being implemented effectively and have already led to stronger engagement and more positive attitudes by students, staff and the wider community. Given the foundations that are in place to build on strengths, the school has increased its capacity to sustain further improvements.

The quality of external support from the Greater Manchester Challenge and the local authority has been variable. It has made a positive contribution to improving the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of attendance strategies, the management of behaviour and in developing senior and middle leaders. In English and mathematics, external support was of limited value but recent support from the local authority and a partner school has begun to have a positive impact. Support from the headteacher mentor and School 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

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- To improve students' progress and raise standards, the school should:
 - ensure that work in lessons provides the correct level of challenge for all groups of students, especially the higher attainers
 - monitor regularly and continuously the progress of all groups of students throughout the school to check that targets are sufficiently challenging and that the work provided is enabling them to accelerate their progress towards these targets
 - use the improved records of progress to inform a more rigorous evaluation, by senior leaders and governors, of the impact of the school's work
 - provide more opportunities in subjects other than English for students to improve their reading, writing and speaking skills.
- To improve attendance, the school should:
 - evaluate the strategies being used to reduce absence in order to identify and concentrate more on those that are most effective.