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Mr G Schlick
Headteacher
Bedminster Down School
Donald Road
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Dear Mr Schlick

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Bedminster Down School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 26 January 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 particular thanks to the students and the members of the governing body who gave up their time to meet with my colleague and myself; their contributions were most helpful.

The present headteacher took up his post in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 16–17 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.

Students' achievement is currently satisfactory. Attainment continues to be low but is improving rapidly. In the 2010 examinations, there was a marked increase in the proportion of students who gained five A*-C grades, including English and mathematics, the key measure for National Challenge schools such as Bedminster Down. There were improvements compared with the previous year, too, in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics, business studies and French. Scrutiny of students' work and of the assessment information provided by the school clearly indicates that rates of progress of all groups of students, while remaining satisfactory, are accelerating securely and quickly. Students' progress in



mathematics remains slower than in English but the gap is narrowing gradually over time.

Since taking up his appointment, the headteacher has led a successful focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. The proportion of good or better teaching seen in lessons is improving at a steady rate, although there are still relatively few lessons where teaching and learning are exceptional; no outstanding lessons were seen during the inspection. The most effective teaching is typically well-planned and, in most cases, there is an appropriate match between the tasks set and pupils' capabilities and interests. Since the previous inspection, there has been an increase in the number of opportunities students have to work with their peers in collaborative tasks and to undertake extended writing across the curriculum. However, in the lessons seen during the inspection, many students still relied too heavily on the teacher and they were not challenged enough to reflect upon and articulate what they had learned, especially at the ends of lessons. Students receive helpful guidance through the marking of their work, especially in English, and they are generally clear about what they need to do to improve.

Progress in improving rates of attendance since the previous inspection has been slow. However, there are indications that the comprehensive range of procedures which the school has implemented and applied with vigour are beginning to show early signs of impact. For example, attendance in Year 11 in 2009/10 was at its highest for five years, and Year 7 attendance this year is well up on the comparable period in 2009/10. There remains a stubbornly intractable group of persistent absentees, but, again, the proportion of such students has reduced slightly in two year groups in the present academic year. The school has ambitious and well-focused plans to develop the curriculum in both key stages as a medium-to-long-term strategy to secure improved attendance and achievement in the future. It has also identified a need to raise the aspirations of students and parents/carers and has embarked upon a range of measures to achieve this, including the Aim Higher initiative, to encourage more students to work towards higher education.

The school's specialist technology status continues to make a distinct and useful contribution to the school. Extensive information and communication technology facilities are well used in a range of subjects and have supported the improving trend in the quality of teaching and learning. Attainment and rates of progress in technology subjects and in science are broadly in line with national standards and are consistently among the highest in the school.

Evidence from the inspection indicates that the local authority generally provides effective and well-received support to school leaders and the governing body, especially with regard to financial matters and the training provided for subject leaders to improve the school's capacity for sustained improvement. The impact of local authority support to improve attendance is less apparent.



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

Ken Bush

Additional inspector



Annex

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

- Raise attainment further by ensuring that learning and progress are consistently good across a wide range of subjects.
- In order to ensure that students' learning and progress improve from satisfactory to good, the school should improve the quality of teaching so that learning and progress are good or better in 75% of lessons by July 2010 by: providing more opportunities for students to undertake extended guided discussion and extended written work enabling students to take more responsibility for their own learning so that they are less reliant on continuous direction from the teacher to make progress enabling teachers to develop and apply the skills needed to increase the proportion of teaching which is outstanding.
- To ensure that attendance moves from being low to broadly average, the school should raise attendance to at least 92.3% by July 2010 by: further reducing the percentage of students who are persistently absent through the consistent and sustained application of strategies proven to improve attendance tackling key groups of poor attenders.