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18 March 2011

Mrs J Palmer Sayer  
Hertswood School  
Cowley Hill  
Borehamwood  
WD6 5LG

Dear Mrs Palmer Sayer

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

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 March 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 thanks to the governors, staff and students who gave up their time to meet with me during the inspection.

Apart from the fact that the school currently has a vacancy for the post of director of specialism, there have been no significant changes to the context of the school since the previous inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 14 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:

good progress in making improvements

*and*

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C rose significantly in 2010 from 65% to 73%, slightly below the national average. The proportion gaining five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, rose by 11 percentage points. The school has had a major and

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successful drive to improve students' performance in English, and the rise in standards in English has contributed to the good overall improvement in students' attainment and achievement.

Key elements in the wide-ranging programme of improvements have been:

- an overhaul of the school's homework policy to include a major weekly focus on writing
- revision and reinforcement of the school's marking policy
- an emphasis on writing across the curriculum
- intervention strategies and booster groups for those making slow progress
- themed weeks for the whole school and neighbouring primary schools, such as the 'Funky Fairytales' week which was in flow during the inspection.

Staff and students are very clear about the importance of raising the quality of students' writing. They have embraced the new initiatives wholeheartedly, and regular checking of students' books by senior leaders shows that staff are following the school's new policies consistently. Random sampling of students' work during the inspection confirmed this to be the case. However, it also indicated that students do not always gain maximum benefit from the marking of their work by responding to the comments made by their teachers, by redrafting their work or by correcting the mistakes they have made.

In ensuring the school challenges higher-ability students more effectively, the school has looked carefully at many of its procedures to ensure they are enforced rigorously and consistently. The school is using the most ambitious predictions of future grades to set challenging targets for students. Students are given very clear indication of the level at which they are working through regular assessment of their work, and there is frequent emphasis in lessons on what is required for them to reach the next level or grade. Staff appreciate the weekly staff meetings in which individuals share good practice and provide new resources for others to implement in their lessons. Senior leaders carry out a rigorous programme of lesson observations to assure the quality of the teaching and identify areas for improvement. Occasionally, evaluations err on the generous side, although all feedback to teachers contains useful pointers for improvement. Current assessment data show that all those identified as higher-ability students in Year 11 are on target to reach challenging targets and to contribute to a further rise in standards by the end of the year.

Through the improvements in attainment and progress, and the imaginative ways in which the school has sought to develop students' literacy skills and share good teaching practice, the school's leaders have demonstrated greater capacity for sustained improvement than was evident at the previous inspection. This improving capacity is also demonstrated through the rigour with which all aspects of the school's work are evaluated. Progress against the detailed actions outlined in the

school development plan is reviewed by the governing body. 'Results Evaluation Documents', produced for each subject, record the evaluation process that subject leaders have undertaken and the strategies for further improvement which faculties intend to implement during the year. These plans are evaluated through regular line management meetings. The progress of the many different groups of students is monitored carefully to ensure that all students are making sufficient progress. Staff are united behind their leadership team and show a determination to continue the improvements which have been evident over the last four terms since the previous inspection.

The school's arts specialism continues to have a major impact on the life of the school, providing students with a broad range of curricular options and extra-curricular activities in art and design, music, drama and dance. Evidence of high-quality work in these subjects is displayed throughout the school. Students' participation in a wide range of performances has had a major impact on improving their confidence and self-esteem. Through wide-ranging outreach work, the specialism has strengthened the school's links with the local community and, in particular, primary schools.

The school continues to benefit from a close and supportive relationship with the local authority, which has provided consistent and helpful advice and consultancy for the school's leadership team. On a practical front, funding from the county council has enabled the school to create an excellent multi-use games area on the lower school campus. The borough council has made a significant investment in the school's community theatre, which provides a state-of-the-art performance space which the school shares with the local community.

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

Graham Sims  
Additional inspector

## Annex

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

- Raise the proportion of students gaining five GCSE A\* to C grades in English and mathematics by:
  - improving students' literacy skills, particularly in writing
  - more clearly evaluating the impact of any initiatives and strategies to improve students' literacy.
  
- Ensure all higher ability students are challenged and encouraged sufficiently to achieve their potential by:
  - ensuring much greater consistency in the use of assessment and challenging targets for some students
  - sharing the good practice in teaching and learning that exists across the school more systematically.
  
- Ensure all aspects of the school's work are evaluated with equal rigour so that this provides a clear basis for improvement by:
  - ensuring all initiatives and strategies to improve are frequently reviewed and clearly linked to students' outcomes
  - using trend data more consistently
  - providing more consistent and coherent monitoring and evaluation in key areas, such as equalities monitoring.