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Mr R Devlin
Acting headteacher
Beckmead School
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Dear Mr Devlin

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Beckmead School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 30 March 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of the governing body and the principal adviser from the local authority for meeting with me. Thank you also for the hospitality shown to my colleague, who joined me in a shadow capacity.

There have been significant changes in staffing since the last inspection. Following the resignation of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher took on the acting headship from September 2010. Also at that time, two assistant headteachers were appointed and a consultant headteacher has taken the role of the deputy headteacher in an interim capacity. Some of the teachers have moved on. The chair of the governing body is the same as at the time of the last inspection. It is anticipated that a substantive headteacher will be appointed by June 2011, to take up the post by January 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 30 June and 1 July 2010, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement. There is still a lot to be done in order to make up for the weaknesses in students' academic and personal outcomes because, as identified at the last inspection, the baselines for their achievement, attendance and behaviour were so low. Nevertheless, the acting headteacher has established an ethos of learning, with clear expectations for staff and students, and this is making a positive difference to the outcomes for students.

Over the past two terms, the senior staff and the governing body have focused on improving attendance and behaviour and reducing the number of exclusions. They have succeeded in all of these areas. Although still low, attendance rates have improved on average by 15%. Exclusions rose initially as a result of strict adherence to the behaviour policy and because students were no longer able to attend part-time and found the new arrangements difficult to cope with. However, the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced to less than a third of what it was at the beginning of this academic year. Students' behaviour has improved, particularly in lessons. It is no longer the case that students repeatedly walk out of lessons or deliberately disrupt the work of others. When they do, they respond well to guidance from staff and, on most occasions, are able to resume their work after a short period of time. This is because staff are more skilful at managing students' behaviour, the curriculum has improved and there are higher expectations for students to learn. Relationships between staff and students are positive and purposeful. Staff manage students' behaviour calmly, consistently and with a directness that gives students clear information about their own responsibilities. Students receive a lot of close support and supervision and this sometimes reduces opportunities for them to regulate their behaviour.

For those students who attend regularly, the school provides better access to an appropriate curriculum and suitable opportunities to make the progress that they are capable of. Although overall rates of academic progress remain below expectations, barriers to students' learning are now being addressed with suitable urgency. As a result, some students are making better progress, particularly the younger students in English and mathematics and in other subjects for all age ranges. Individual literacy programmes are helping most students to improve their reading skills, some significantly. It remains the case that academic and personal progress for those with poor attendance is not as good as it could be.

The curriculum has improved in many respects, helping students to be more interested and engaged in lessons and avoid being excluded from school. Senior staff and members of the governing body took immediate action to cease part-time placements, ensuring that all students had their entitlement to a full timetable from September 2010. For some students this was the first time in two years that they were expected to come to school every day and this had an initial negative impact on behaviour and exclusions, particularly on the incidence of serious assaults on staff by older students. Improvements to the curriculum are driven by a suitably strong focus on raising students' attainments and providing them with opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do. At the time of the last inspection, GCSEs were available in English and mathematics. The current Year 11 are studying for five GCSEs and this will increase to seven subjects for students in Year 10. Options are currently limited to a choice between physical education and information and communication technology. Religious education is now taught to all students but there is no teaching of a modern foreign language or music in Key Stages 2 and 3. The development of the learning support unit has a significant impact on the attendance, attitude to work and achievement for a small group of students. They

enjoy their learning and are pleased with their achievements. Their access to this provision is well planned, well thought through and regularly evaluated.

Monitoring and evaluation by senior staff and the local authority have focused on the quality of teaching, attendance, behaviour and exclusions. This has successfully improved each of these areas but evaluations of students' academic progress have faltered. For example, pupil-progress meetings have not been held for some time. Now that the curriculum is of better quality and there are higher expectations for behaviour and attendance, senior staff are aware that attention needs to be more firmly fixed on the quality of students' academic achievement when scrutinising the impact of the actions taken. Analysis of students' attainment has identified those who are underachieving and appropriate support put in place, such as literacy programmes and some flexible curricular arrangements in partnership with external providers. The impact of these programmes on students' academic and personal progress has not yet taken place. Some inadequate teaching remains but an extensive programme of lesson observations over the past two terms indicates that most teaching is satisfactory or better.

The local authority provided a suitable statement of action to support the school in addressing the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. Over the past two terms, advisers and consultants have provided the school with appropriate support, particularly in ensuring secure interim leadership and developing areas of the curriculum, such as science. The school welcomes this support.

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

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2010

- Improve monitoring and evaluation to ensure that all students do as well as they can.
- Improve the curriculum to ensure that all students get a consistent balance of subjects that they are entitled to and that lessons motivate and engage all students effectively.
- Improve attendance by addressing issues of part-time placements, ensuring that provision successfully motivates all students, and continuing to improve behaviour so that exclusions further decline.