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6 April 2011

Mr Nigel Mountford
Headteacher
The Harwich School
Hall Lane
Harwich
CO12 3TG

Dear Mr Mountford

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of The Harwich School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 April 2011, for the time you gave to our pre-inspection discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the students and members of staff who spoke to us.

Since the last inspection, the school has changed its specialist status from languages to humanities. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been revised to provide a wider range of vocational subjects.

As a result of the inspection on 23 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.

Since the last inspection, attainment has improved in several respects. This is due to a number of factors. The number of students who are persistently absent has been halved. Behaviour is improving so that fewer students are excluded. The new BTEC vocational courses are allowing many more students to succeed. The school's system for monitoring students' progress is now well established and is used to target extra support towards students at risk of underachievement. Students now get regular updates on their performance, based on their attendance, punctuality, effort and academic performance. Students therefore push themselves harder. As one commented, 'Teachers really want us to succeed now. We care more because they care more.' As a result, overall attainment has improved.



In the 2010 examinations, there was a big improvement in GCSE English results, with students making good progress. The new BTEC science course enabled many more students to gain the equivalent of two GCSEs at grade C or better. Consequently, more students gained five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. Across most subjects, progress improved, especially for girls. However, standards improved only slightly in mathematics and remained low overall.

Over the last year, the mathematics department has worked hard to improve teaching and learning to a satisfactory level. As a result, students now progress at an acceptable rate and standards in mathematics have improved to broadly average.

The new humanities specialism, which includes English, is making an important contribution to longer term success. It has brought a renewed focus on literacy and on thinking skills. The specialist areas include some of the most effective teaching and assessment and provide a model for improving these aspects across the school.

These improvements illustrate the school's growing capacity for sustained improvement. Senior leaders continue to provide a strong sense of drive and ambition. They evaluate the school honestly and accurately. For example, they have addressed weaknesses in the identification of students with special educational needs. They have also responded to 2010's disappointing sixth form outcomes by revising the sixth form curriculum and improving advice and guidance for students. New pathways are being developed for students who have gained a Level 2 qualification in Key Stage 4, but who are not quite ready for a Level 3 course.

While some progress has been made in improving the use of assessment in lessons, senior leaders are aware from their regular and accurate lesson observations that there is still considerable scope for improvement. Furthermore, the quality of marking is still variable. Senior leaders recognise that to secure good progress for all they need to increase the proportion of good teaching and to make sure that every student understands the need to avoid unnecessary absences.

The school engages appropriately with external partners. It is developing the skills of middle leaders by working closely with a successful school from a different part of Essex. The School Improvement Partner has provided pertinent and well focused reports. The local authority has provided expertise to help rationalise the process of assessing students' special educational needs.

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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

September 2010

Annex

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

- Raise further students attainment and achievement across the school by:
 - ensuring that the improved systems for tracking students' progress are established fully, for all year groups, for the start of Spring Term 2010
 - establishing a more consistent approach to using assessment in the classroom, not only to share existing good practice but also to improve further the impact of teaching on the quality of students' learning
 - ensuring a more consistent approach to the marking of students' work, within faculties, in order to aid students' understanding of what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring the continued, close monitoring and support for the school's National Challenge subjects: English, mathematics, science and modern languages.

- Continue the good work being undertaken with students, and the families of students, who are persistent absentees in order to:
 - improve the attainment, learning and progress of such students
 - raise attendance rates to the school's National Challenge target of 92% by the end of the current academic year
 - ensure the school pursues plans with local institutions, organisations and the community police to help in the monitoring of persistent absentees.