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Mr David Seddon  
Headteacher  
Baxter College  
Habberley Road  
Kidderminster  
DY11 5PQ

Dear Mr Seddon

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your college on Thursday 16 September 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass my thanks to the students and staff for the time they gave to share their views with me.

Since the last inspection a vice-principal has retired and has not been replaced. The college has also gained National Challenge Trust status.

As a result of the inspection on 26-27 January 2009, the college was asked to:

- analyse attendance data more rigorously to identify emerging trends of poor attendance and ensure parents are contacted promptly by a member of staff when their child is absent
- ensure students develop their independent learning skills by giving them more opportunities to work on their own initiative in lessons and through frequent and regular homework tasks
- evaluate more thoroughly the impact of any actions taken to improve standards and the quality of education provided
- ensure lessons finish on time and that students are given more encouragement to be punctual to lessons.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the college has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

GCSE results have improved quite sharply since the college's last inspection. For instance in 2010 40% of students gained 5 A\* to C, including English and mathematics, compared to 18% in 2008. In 2010 a highly impressive 87% of students gained 5 A\* to C qualifications. A much improved curriculum and well



targeted additional support, particularly in Year 11, made a substantial contribution to this rise. The college has improved the performance of boys so they are now achieving as well as the girls.

Throughout the college students are making better progress and attitudes to learning are more positive. Students are now making good progress in English as a result of much more effective teaching in this subject. The effective implementation of a range of new science courses in Years 10 and 11 has improved results in this subject. Performance in the subjects associated with the college specialism is more varied. Challenging targets have been exceeded in business and information and communication technology. Although results in mathematics are gradually rising they remain below average. More effective care, support and guidance are ensuring students with special needs and/or disabilities progress as well as other students.

In all subjects, students have much increased opportunities to work independently. Students are frequently presented with scenarios in which they have to take responsibility for undertaking research, often resulting in a presentation of findings to the rest of the class. Homework is more frequent and includes opportunities for more extended studies. In the best lessons observed, teachers ensured a high pace of learning by linking the task to interesting contexts in the real world. For instance, students in the role of scientists advised a cleaning products company on the most effective way of investigating the absorbency of materials. Students worked best when they had clear timed targets that were regularly reinforced. In the best practice, teachers intervened during lessons in order to praise students working well and to clarify what was required to attain really well, often using examples from the lesson. The levels of challenge were high because of teachers' good subject knowledge and an ability to focus regularly on higher order thinking associated with application and critical analysis. Questioning was used to ensure all students engaged with the key ideas rather than relying on willing volunteers. The quality of discussion was very high in an English lesson because the teacher used effective strategies to ensure all students were involved. Students were often actively involved in assessing the extent to which they had achieved their targets and in identifying improvement.

Although a reducing proportion of lessons are less effective, there are occasions when students are not sufficiently challenged. For instance, opportunities are missed to enable all students to engage critically with the lesson content and a cursory approach is sometime taken to the concluding part of lessons.

The senior leadership have a growing record of successfully tackling weaknesses, particularly related to the curriculum and the use of intervention. Improved monitoring and evaluation are enabling the college to better prioritise areas for improvement and to make more effective use of external support. Improved evaluation is also resulting in highly valued whole-college training and professional development that is better tailored to meet the needs of individual staff. The college has developed a comprehensive and robust approach to its evaluation of learning



and teaching. Inspectors' views about this aspect of provision closely matched those of the college. For instance, the college's current focus on increasing challenge is highly appropriate. The well organised leader responsible for learning and teaching is highly instrumental in ensuring improvement. Middle leaders are generally enthusiastic and focused on improving learning. However, there is some variability in how effectively they evaluate the work of departments and ensure improvement follows.

In tackling the key issue related to attendance, the college has gone beyond the recommendations made at the last inspection. A new computerised system has been introduced to monitor attendance more efficiently. In partnership with other local schools, a policy is being implemented that is beginning to change attitudes towards attendance amongst the whole community. Enhanced use of rewards and praise has further raised expectations. The college has eliminated the problems associated with lessons not finishing exactly on time by the introduction of short period of transition. All of this effective action has greatly improved attendance and punctuality.

The college is using its specialism to spearhead a much greater focus on learning linked to the world of work. Extensive links with other organisations also contribute to this. Students are adopting a more business-like approach to their studies and all undertake courses that are more relevant to their future careers. The impact of external support has been good. Middle leaders enthused about the work of local authority consultants, particularly in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. Senior staff praised the support they have received from their National Challenge Adviser.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your college. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

