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Mr P Hasan-Richardson
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hasan-Richardson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of The Albany, A Business and Enterprise College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 May 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please do extend my sincere thanks to the staff and the students visited by inspectors in lessons, and those we interviewed.

As a result of the inspection on 3 and 4 March 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The current headteacher was acting headteacher for two years, prior to becoming the substantive headteacher two years ago. The school was a 'Gaining Ground School' and is now joining two local schools in June 2011 to become a federated academy.

In 2010, GCSE results improved to within national averages, but the school did not make its target of 65% of students gaining 5 A* to C GCSEs (including English and mathematics). The majority of students, excluding more able girls and boys, underachieved and made inadequate progress in relation to their prior attainment. In particular, only 59% of students made the expected progress in English and in mathematics 60% make the expected progress. More able students made



satisfactory levels of progress and the proportion who achieved the A* and A grades was low. The progress of boys was better than that of girls.

As a result of early examination entries, effective tracking of underachieving students and structured interventions for current Year 11 students, the school is raising achievement in mathematics and English. Student outcomes this year in relation to 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and mathematics), are predicted to rise slightly above the school target of 59%, with an increase in A*-A grades.

In the last year, the headteacher and senior leaders implemented professional staff development and restructured managerial staff to address shortcomings in the quality of teaching. In lessons observed by inspectors, the majority of students made satisfactory progress and some made good progress, but in a small minority of lessons, particularly in mathematics and science, students' progress was inadequate. In science, students were not encouraged to develop predictive and investigative skills as teachers' management of experiments did not effectively facilitate students' understanding of the basic scientific precepts. In mathematics, although inspectors observed students making satisfactory and good progress in the majority of lessons; in a minority of lessons, students were not extended in their learning or given opportunities for independent learning, especially the more able students.

Most teachers do not use information on students' prior attainment in planning learning tasks so as to meet the full range of needs. Students generally demonstrate keen attitudes to learning. However, across all subjects, teachers and teaching assistants do not set high enough challenge and aspirations for students during activities. Through discussions, students confirmed inspectors' observations. In a number of lessons, some students struggle to understand basic concepts critical to underpinning knowledge, and many are not developing crucial presentation, literacy and critical thinking skills. Where assessment processes successfully underpin the planning of learning, students are challenged and supported well. In one food technology lesson, students were given excellent opportunities to develop their independent learning and investigative skills. Some good examples of peer assessment were observed in English. However, in the majority of lessons across all subjects, teachers did not consistently check what their students were learning before moving on to the next activity. Marking of students' work is of inconsistent quality. The majority of students interviewed across subjects knew their targets, but were less sure of what they needed to do to attain these.

The school's specialist status in business and computing contributes to raising achievement through a range of qualifications that are appropriate to students' needs. An integrated curriculum in Year 7 and guided options enable Year 9 students to start GCSE courses early. The science curriculum is suitable for students of all abilities, resulting in good outcomes in BTEC and GCSE science.

The school has successfully tackled poor behaviour and this is now good. Students were observed to be respectful and polite in lessons.

A recently formed 'teaching and learning communities group' is steering through the school's priority of raising teaching standards and teachers' aspirations. However, internal teaching monitoring processes lack sufficient focus on assessment and students' learning and progress. Developmental aspects of improving teaching are not fully implemented, for instance, by sharing good cross-curriculum practice.

The school has been satisfactorily supported by the local authority, especially in relation to staff development sessions for teaching of gifted and talented students. Whilst there is good capacity to improve in senior leaders and the heads of department for mathematics and English, there is too much unevenness in practice across middle leaders. The school has rightly identified this in-school variation as a priority.

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

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the rate of progress for students in English and mathematics so that by August 2010 65% of students gain five A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics by:
 - continuing to focus on planning lessons based on the prior learning of individual students
 - ensuring students utilise the guidance provided by individual marking and assessment
 - further refining the tracking and monitoring of the progress of individual and groups of students
- Ensure that the most able students are challenged and extended so that there is an increase in the proportion of A* and A grades achieved across all curriculum areas by:
 - developing students as more active participants in their learning
 - sharing the best practice from within the school and from other schools
 - raising expectations and aspirations of what the students are capable of achieving.