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24 June 2011

Ms S Hearne  
Principal  
The Latimer Arts College  
Castle Way  
Kettering  
NN15 6SW

Dear Ms Hearne

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of The Latimer Arts College**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 June 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, students, School Improvement Partner, and representatives of the local authority who spoke with me during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 24 November 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.

At the time of the previous inspection, students' achievement was judged to be inadequate. The school's monitoring data clearly shows a significant improvement in the proportion of students likely to attain five or more GCSEs at grade C or above including English and mathematics. Detailed performance data suggests that students' progress has improved sharply in mathematics. An early entry policy in mathematics has ensured that 66% of students already have a grade C or above. There have also been improvements in attainment in science courses but less markedly so in additional and core science. The school's tracking data, seen during the inspection, suggest that this improvement can be sustained and built on in future years. The school is responding positively to the issues raised during the previous inspection and is setting itself more challenging targets. It is thus raising the ambition and expectations of staff and students.

The improvements in the sixth form are slower, and module results in March 2011 indicate a mixed picture of performance. The school has changed its entry criteria into the sixth form, and initial advice and guidance is now clearly geared to ensuring

students are on the right courses. Not all the changes made have had sufficient time to impact on student outcomes. Attendance in sixth form is currently running at 95% and so exceeding the target set of 93%. Rigorous registration procedures and systems have improved attendance tracking and monitoring. The school now has accurate data on sixth form attendance.

Senior leaders have been relentless in their focus on improving teaching and learning. There is systematic monitoring and observation of teaching and learning which ensure that senior leaders have an accurate overview of teaching. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school. Robust action is being taken to eliminate inadequate learning in lessons and improve the proportion of teaching that is good or better. Inadequate teaching is thus decreasing. All staff whose teaching is causing concern receive effective support. Support plans are well focussed, providing practical guidance from other teachers and external advisers. The impact of this is evident in lessons seen during the visit.

All lessons were visited jointly with senior leaders to focus on issues raised at the last inspection. The better lessons observed were well organised lessons and provided the students with a variety of learning activities. These included opportunities to work individually and in small groups, and the use of peer assessment. Positive relationships ensured all students were engaged in learning. Presentation in books showed a marked improvement, with many books seen which were neat and graffiti free. Lesson planning addressed the needs of different groups by providing both challenge and support. For example, in a religious education lesson, the teacher provided a structured writing frame to help lower attaining students to answer a short examination question while, for others, there was the opportunity to write freely and incorporate different sources of evidence. Literacy and numeracy skills are being better incorporated into lessons, with frequent focus on key words. This is supplemented with literacy and numeracy weeks, in form time. Sometimes, opportunities are missed to improve students' speaking skills. In lessons where teaching was less effective, the teacher talked for too long, questions were not well targeted and not all students were actively involved. While some teachers are asking more probing and open ended questions, too much is left to those who put their hands up. These lessons lack pace, and the demands placed on the students are at too low a level.

Marking is improving but remains inconsistent across the school. Good practice was seen in humanities and English, where students were given precise guidance on how to improve and had clear criteria by which to assess their progress. Student progress tracker sheets were used very effectively in these subjects so students clearly understood how to achieve the next steps in their learning, therefore enabling students to achieve challenging targets. The quality of advice from teachers is not always sharply focused.

The school's improvements have been underpinned by increased accountability among middle leaders. Middle leaders are making a bigger contribution to the

monitoring and evaluation of their subjects. The link between senior and middle leaders has been strengthened, with regular meetings and common agendas. There is a clear monitoring schedule. Middle leaders have a good knowledge of what needs to be improved in their subject areas and use data to improve progress. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of staff in their teams. There is a joint approach to monitoring and evaluation, with middle leaders and senior leaders working together on reviews of student work and lesson observations. Teamwork is driving forward improvements well. Follow-up actions show that leaders at all levels are being held more accountable. The Principal and senior leaders provide clear direction and there is a good pace of change.

Specialist status in performing arts is helping to improve outcomes for students by strong performance on vocational based courses. There is high participation by students in arts activities.

The support from the local authority and School Improvement Partner have been strong, thus ensuring the school got to grips with issues very quickly. They are both providing a good balance of challenge and support, ensuring senior leaders have a realistic view of the progress the school is making.

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

Davinder Dosanjh  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2010**

- Improve the progress students make in the main college and the sixth form by:
  - eradicating inadequate teaching
  - ensuring all teachers effectively plan lessons that enable all groups of students in lessons to make good progress
  - effectively promoting higher standards of presentation
  - ensuring all students are aware of their challenging targets and what they must do to achieve them
  - improving the use of assessment so that questioning ensures all students are challenged and in order to more accurately determine the next steps in learning
  - ensuring students' literacy and numeracy skills are promoted in all lessons.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation in the main college and the sixth form by:
  - increasing middle leaders' involvement in the monitoring of teaching and learning, including regularly reviewing students' work
  - ensuring evaluations of teaching focus on the progress made by all groups of students in lessons
  - ensuring effective action is taken promptly in response to evaluations of the effectiveness of teaching and the use of assessment.
  
- Improve the rate of attendance in the sixth form so that it is at least 93% by December 2011.