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23 June 2011

Mr C Roberts
Headteacher
Smithills School
Smithills Dean Road
Bolton
Lancashire
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Dear Mr Roberts,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Smithills School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 June 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to your governors, students and the local authority.

Since the last inspection there have been many changes at the school, most notably in staffing. The headteacher is retiring and leaves at the end of the summer term. A temporary head of English has been appointed from within the school to cover a leave of absence. An advanced skills teacher for mathematics has been appointed to start in September and a consultant who worked for National Strategies was appointed in April this year to lead on literacy and support the development of teaching and learning across the school. The school is experiencing falling rolls and, as a result, has reviewed staffing and provision, making cuts to staff who support students with behavioural difficulties. The school has created the DELTA centre to provide more targeted support for students with behavioural issues.

As a result of the inspection on 30 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 inadequate progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the last inspection, attainment and progress at Key Stage 4 have declined and in 2010, the overwhelming majority of attainment indicators were significantly below average. Boys' attainment in English has risen by five percentage points yet has remained static in mathematics leaving both measures still significantly below average. Boys' progress in both mathematics and English is significantly below average. The school did not predict the fall in results last year but has taken swift and decisive action as a result.

The school has greatly strengthened its monitoring systems and these show that Year 11 students are on track for improvements in 2011 in both English and mathematics. Results of

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early entry for GCSE mathematics and English are positive. Current tracking shows that results for this year are on track to be much higher than last year. Students have a better understanding of how well they are doing and how they can improve. Students report that there have been significant improvements in behaviour in the last year due to the opening of the DELTA centre. Although some poor behaviour was observed, where teaching was weaker, students behaved in an orderly manner around the school.

Teaching has shown little improvement since the last inspection. The majority of teaching observed was satisfactory with none outstanding. A small minority of teaching was good and a very small minority inadequate. In the good lessons, expectations are high and students make good progress because of effective teaching with plenty of challenge, independent learning and a brisk pace. However, in the majority of lessons, students are passive, the pace is still slow and work is still not tailored to meet individual needs. The quality of marking remains variable and does not always give the detailed feedback necessary for students to know how to improve their work. Whilst a few examples were seen of information and communication technology being used to effectively support learning, these are not widespread and the continuing lack of good practice means that it is still not used effectively enough to support learning.

Challenging targets are now set at both key stages, monitoring and intervention strategies have been tightened and are more focused. However, this has so far had a limited impact because of the many and varied staffing changes. Data and information are now effectively shared, although the use of data to inform learning is still too variable. The school recognises that there were some serious inconsistencies in tracking data last year and has taken effective steps to remedy this.

Senior leaders know the school well and understand that rapidly improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics and English, is required to raise achievement. They are starting to take the actions needed to accelerate the pace of improvement. Members of the governing body have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The School Improvement Partner is working closely with the school to assist them in their continued focus to improve outcomes. School leaders recognise that advice from the School Improvement Partner has not previously been acted upon swiftly enough and are taking action to remedy this.

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

Mrs Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector

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Annex

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

- Raise the attainment and progress of boys, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - monitoring, evaluating and analysing how well lessons are planned to meet individual needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning with particular reference to:
 - pace and challenge
 - the use of assessment to effectively support learning
 - the imaginative and effective use of information and communication technology to enhance learning.