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14 July 2011

Mr J Keulemans
Headteacher
Our Lady's RC Sports College
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Dear Mr Keulemans

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Our Lady's RC Sports College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Chris Griffin, additional inspector, and I inspected your school on 13 July 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 the staff and students who spoke with us and your School Improvement Partner for talking with me on the telephone.

The headteacher's appointment in January 2011 has initiated a significant series of changes across the school, including a restructuring of the senior team and substantial plans for changes to take effect from September 2011. Some key external appointments to the teaching staff in the form of advanced skills teachers in mathematics and science have been made for September.

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The achievement of students improved significantly in 2010, particularly in relation to the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above including English and mathematics. On the basis of the school's estimates, which proved accurate in 2010, there should be further improvement in 2011. English GCSE results were close to the national average and the proportion of students gaining two GCSE science passes has increased significantly. Steps have been taken to accelerate progress in mathematics and senior leaders recognise that this is the most urgent area for improvement. During the inspection, inspectors saw students enjoying their learning and working together well in lessons.

July 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The restructuring of leadership, partly begun at the beginning of the academic year, the headteacher's appointment and the changes he has planned to take effect from September 2011, have strengthened the overall leadership of the school considerably. Roles have been clarified and members of the senior team are better able to exercise autonomy and initiative in driving improvement. Middle leaders, especially in English, mathematics and science, understand more clearly their accountability for the outcomes in their subjects. An intensive programme of support and intervention has been used to help Year 11 students, resulting in the improvements in achievement. Professional development activities aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school have also taken place. In most lessons observed, students were engaged in inquiry-based learning; technology, such as the interactive white boards, were used effectively and students were able to discuss their learning and exchange ideas. A teaching and learning group has been created to start work in September, incorporating three advanced skills teachers and others to improve quality further.

Despite the relatively short interval between the last inspection and this monitoring visit, the school has also made progress in adapting the curriculum. Science courses have been reorganised to enable more students to achieve two GCSE passes. Plans are in place to introduce separate sciences. A number of other courses have been added or adapted to ensure appropriate stretch and challenge for all. Intensive guidance and support for Year 9 students making subject choices for Year 10 have brought about a substantial increase in the proportion of students who will be eligible for the English Baccalaureate. The introduction of new arrangements for the teaching of citizenship has made a substantial impact on its quality and on students' awareness of how to promote community cohesion. Attendance and punctuality have been significantly improved following the introduction of a comprehensive suite of strategies. The impact has been most marked in the 75% reduction in the number of persistent absentees over the last two years.

The school's sporting specialism has a strong, positive impact on the school. Students enjoy their physical education and the department provides positive models of good practice in teaching and learning for the remainder of the school. The local authority, through the allocation of additional school improvement time to the school this year, has provided good support. A very clear understanding of the current weaknesses in the school, the strengthening of leadership, the progress made in addressing the areas for improvement and the evidence of coherent improvement planning for the coming year, demonstrate the improved capacity for sustained improvement.

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

Mr John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

July 2011



Annex

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

- Ensure that the development of consistently high quality leadership at all levels contributes to:
 - improvements in standards and provision particularly in science, mathematics and the social sciences
 - providing greater challenge, especially for the more-able students through: learning based on enquiry rather than instruction; tasks which build on previous work; better use of technology to stimulate thinking; and providing more opportunities for students to discuss and exchange ideas.

- Provide a relevant curriculum that meets the needs of all students, by:
 - ensuring a wider range of pathways are available for the more-able students, in particular for those who wish to follow a more academic route
 - ensuring that the requirements for citizenship are fully met, identifying more clearly how community cohesion can be reinforced through lessons
 - continuing improvement in attendance and punctuality to lessons.