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15 September 2011

David Clark
Headteacher
William Allitt School
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Dear Mr Clark,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of William Allitt School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 14 September 2011, together with Tony Beaver, additional inspector, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also thank the students that we met.

Since the previous inspection in May 2010, there have been significant changes in the leadership of the school. In September 2010, a new headteacher took up post and, since then, appointments have also been made to further strengthen the leadership team.

As a result of the inspection on 19 May 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 good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The GCSE results of 2010 remained below average. Measures of progress were well below average for all subjects and in English, while in mathematics they were below average. However, in 2011, provisional results at GCSE were the best in the school's history. Attainment has risen sharply to above average, with 84% of students gaining five or more good grades at GCSE while the proportion of students gaining five or more good grade GCSEs including English and mathematics rose to 61%. Overall standards are now above national averages and progress in English and mathematics is broadly in line with the school's expectations. Students in the current Year 11 are on target for similar results in 2012 and our observations confirmed the school's view that standards and the progress that students make have improved

September 2010



greatly. These improvements are the result of recent developments in the quality of teaching and learning and the targeted support for individual students who looked to be underachieving. The school has set up new systems to monitor students' progress and it now systematically tracks progress, informs students regularly about how things are going, and provides students who are behind in their learning with structured support to help them catch up.

During the monitoring inspection, we observed 21 part-lessons, the majority of which were good or better. The school has taken concerted actions to improve teaching and learning, but these will take time to have a full impact. The key developments include:

- a new and more streamlined tracking system which is about to be rolled out to all teachers
- clear guidelines for the planning and delivery of teaching and learning through a teaching and learning policy which will be launched later this term
- a progress panel that meets after each assessment to closely monitor the progress of all students in their final year
- improved target setting based on objective measures that challenge students to achieve their best
- high expectations that students will achieve their targets.

In the best lessons, learning activities are planned well so that students of all abilities make good progress. In these lessons, students are suitably challenged and they willingly participate in the learning activities that have been planned. Assessment information is used effectively to plan lessons so that all students make the progress that is expected of them. However, these practices are not universal or sufficiently embedded in day-to-day procedures. In the satisfactory lessons, planning remains a weakness and, despite the provision of more reliable tracking and assessment data, not all teachers use this to take enough account of students' different starting points. Learning objectives are not designed to cater for the full ability range in the class. As a result, students do not engage fully in the learning activities because they are either too easy or too hard. This limits progress in these lessons.

The role of middle leaders has been redefined to include regular monitoring of provision. Appropriate training has been given to ensure that good systems are set up to assure quality. Advancement has been made in their improved understanding of the components of good teaching. The monitoring of teaching is now more robust and has raised the expectations of teachers. All leaders participate and are keen to move their departments forward. However, the good practice arising from this monitoring is not fully shared across the school. For example, lesson planning formats that support the framing of progressive learning objectives are not used across the school, resulting in planning that is variable in its effectiveness. The primary focus of monitoring has been to assure good teaching in lessons. The engagement of students as active participants has not been a major priority of

monitoring despite it being an identified priority area arising from the previous inspection.

The school's specialist arts and science departments are being used effectively to raise standards. Their contribution includes the development of the 'opening minds' curriculum in Year 7 through the performing arts department, the support given in science to develop skills at transition from primary school as well as in the establishment of the community dimension which has had such a positive impact across the school.

The school has made good progress in building a stronger capacity for improvement. Since the last inspection, leadership roles have been redefined and aligned directly to school improvement priorities around improving teaching and student achievement. The headteacher and senior team have developed a clearly articulated vision for the school through the publication of its school improvement plan. This sets out the actions and measurable success criteria to meet the school's priorities and improve outcomes for all students. The school is now working steadily towards meeting these success criteria and its progress in doing so is carefully checked by both senior leaders and the governing body. Improvements to the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school have also been made. Consequently, developments have produced positive signs of improving trends in the key areas of the school's work.

The school has received some useful support through their School Improvement Partner who has worked with the relevant staff to improve outcomes in English and has worked with senior leaders to validate their evaluations.

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

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- By July 2011, ensure that the majority of students make good progress by:
 - increasing the proportion of good or better teaching to 75%
 - increasing opportunities for students to actively participate in learning
 - ensuring teaching regularly refers to assessment information to accurately match work to the needs and aspirations of students
 - providing opportunities for teaching staff to share the good and outstanding practice that exists within the school.

- Sharpen the monitoring of teaching and learning and use the information gleaned to further improve provision.