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Mr David Dickson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dickson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Eastbury Comprehensive School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Jennifer Bax, Additional Inspector, on 21 September 2011, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please thank your staff and students for talking to us about their work and for helping with the inspection.

Since the previous inspection a significant minority of teachers have left the school and other teachers have been appointed to replace them. Many of these teachers are part of the 'Teach First' programme or are newly qualified. An additional assistant headteacher has been appointed to strengthen the capacity of the senior leadership team. The school has become increasingly popular and the number of students on roll in the sixth form has increased.

As a result of the inspection in July 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.

Outcomes for students are continuing to rise. The school exceeded its ambitious examination targets in 2011 and most subject departments achieved a good level of GCSE and GCE success. However, there remain a few subjects where students do

not perform as well as expected and a project board has been established to support and challenge these departments on their journey to raise attainment.

Leaders and managers are clear about what needs to be done to overcome barriers to learning and improve outcomes for students. A relentless focus on improving teaching and learning and effective interventions for students who are falling behind or are at risk of falling behind underpin improved achievement. A good climate for learning has been created and students behave well: most demonstrate positive attitudes and enjoy their lessons. School-based professional development opportunities have focused on disseminating effective practice and improving the accuracy of assessing students' progress. A paired-reading scheme, targeted at students with low reading ages, has helped students develop skills in decoding text and develop fluency in their reading. There is a strong focus in most lessons on developing students' literacy skills and the impact of this can be seen in the rapid improvement of students' literacy and in outcomes in English for all the different groups of students.

A common format for lesson planning has been adopted and teachers use assessment information to ensure that tasks and activities are pitched at the right level for the students. However, in some lessons, particularly those where there is a wide range of attainment, planning does not take sufficient account of the precise needs of all groups of students. Learning objectives are generally clear and students who have additional needs are frequently provided with useful materials and extra help to support their learning. Students generally receive good feedback in lessons but marking of students' work is variable. It ranges from good, constructive marking, which provides clear points for improvement that are linked to the learning objective for the task, to marking that is cursory with a brief comment that does little to inform the student about how to improve their work or indicate the level at which they are working.

In the best lessons, teachers use questions well to assess students' understanding and to help them focus on the key areas of their work. However, occasionally, teachers accept simple answers and do not press students to speak at length, or fail to build on their responses. Opportunities for students to discuss work with a partner are missed and, although an increasing proportion of lessons provide good opportunities for peer- and self-assessment, this is not a common feature of all lessons. Most students know their individual targets and in many classrooms there are helpful displays to inform students about what they need to do to achieve the various levels of attainment. Although some students know exactly what level they are working at, there are those who are unsure.

A good range of strategies contributes to improving attendance and any absence is investigated rigorously. The school found that the use of electronic communications to let parents and carers know that a child is unexpectedly absent was not proving particularly effective. Consequently, staff now work more directly with parents and carers and intervene at an earlier stage than previously. Regular newsletters inform

parents and carers about attendance issues and celebrate good attendance. The school has been particularly successful in reducing the number of students who are persistently absent, especially in those groups identified by the previous inspection. Despite a significant reduction, White British students are still over represented in the persistent absence figures. Punctuality has improved and the school has effective procedures to challenge students who are frequently late to school.

The local authority has continued to provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support. Advisers and consultants have supported the school in the implementation of its improvement plan and youth workers support the personal development of students.

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

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve students' skills for future economic well-being by:
 - improving students' punctuality for school
 - improving literacy skills for White British boys
 - improving the attendance of White British students.
- Raise levels of attainment so that by August 2011 at least 47% of students gain five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring all lessons are planned based on the prior learning of individual students
 - ensuring that students consistently know the levels they are working at and what they need to do to improve further
 - ensuring that the good practice in teaching and learning evident in English, mathematics, ICT and physical education is shared across all departments
 - improving the attitudes and skills for learning of a small minority of students.