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Mr Trevor Goddard
Headteacher
The Lord Silkin School
Grange Avenue
District Centre
Stirchley
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Dear Mr Goddard

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of The Lord Silkin School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 October 2011 with my colleague Doug Masterton, 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 pass on my thanks to the staff and students we spoke to and the time given by the representative from the local authority as well as your partner National Leader of Education.

Since the previous inspection you have taken on the substantive role of headteacher, 10 members of staff, including those at senior levels, have either been made redundant or retired, and the director of literacy has also taken on the substantive post as subject leader for English. The school has suffered from a falling roll which led to some uncertainty with regard to its future. This has now, however, been stabilised, in part due to its careful management of a forecasted deficit budget.

As a result of the inspection on 9 June 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.

Students' attainment has risen in almost every key indicator. Crucially, the proportion of students who leave with five GCSEs at grades A*–C is now above average. All students who left school in 2010 and 2011 did so with at least five GCSE qualifications, this being well above the national averages. The number achieving five GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics also increased and while

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still below average has exceeded the government's minimum standard. Progress made by students has improved, with 2010 contextual value added confirming good progress overall. The school's own analyses of 2011 data indicate similar progress for this year group, although in terms of value added measures it is less strong. The school's attainment and progress targets were met, confirming the good impact of the work to improve the quality of teaching and increase the effectiveness of leadership at all levels. The learning and progress of students observed during the visit matched the quality of teaching; much was good or better and some satisfactory. In lessons where students made the most progress, they responded well to teachers' high expectations, contributed well to discussions and were able to reflect on the reasons for their answers.

During the inspection, students' behaviour in lessons and around the site was good, calm and orderly. The positive relationships between staff and students prevent potential disaffection leading to conflict that may hinder progress. Students' attendance is average; another improvement since the previous inspection. The number of those who are persistently absent has reduced and while still above the national average is continuing to decline. This is a result of the school's decisive intervention, strong work with external agencies and increasingly effective work with parents and carers. For example, an after-school event to celebrate Mother's Day welcomed some parents and carers who had previously been reluctant to visit school and this helped them to engage more in their children's learning.

The active school council is well respected and has taken a decisive role in students taking more responsibility. Members organised a 'Have a Say' day, collated students' views and then presented them to senior leaders. These views were taken into account in the recent changes to the school day and in the purchase of benches for the school site. Students also organised an 'Olympic Challenge' which involved a range of activities and outside presenters across two days. They have supported the immediate community by choosing to spend donated money on improving a local park. Opportunities for a wider range of students to take a role in the school's improvement are planned, for example by involving students in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Students' understanding of a wider range of cultures has been supported through the school's world cultures and citizenship lessons as well as opportunities for some to explore aspects of oriental art. In addition, students from Mexico and Spain have visited the school. Students' first-hand experiences of different cultures and faiths are less developed.

Teachers in a range of subjects asked carefully considered questions encouraging students to think more deeply. For example, teachers targeted their questioning so that the level of challenge increased from factual recall to explanation and analysis. In their planning, teachers consider the different levels of learning that will take place, although the extent to which these different levels are catered for during lessons is not consistent. Students often receive valuable feedback on what they need to do to improve their work while in lessons. The quality of written feedback

and application of the school's marking policy remain variable, but there are some excellent examples in English, science and modern foreign languages work books.

The school's specialism in science has resulted in consistently strong outcomes for students in this subject. In addition, the good practice in this department has strengthened the work of other subjects, including in the other specialism of mathematics.

The school's promotion of equality of opportunity has been enhanced by a more rigorous and structured approach to the analysis and tracking of the progress of all groups of students. The development plan explicitly addresses this aspect and has clearly defined short-term but also longer-term goals. For example, as well as targeted intervention for underachieving Key Stage 4 students, alterations to the curriculum are planned to better meet the needs of a changing school population that has increasingly low levels of literacy. Good, focused guidance from the school's partners, including the local authority and a National Leader of Education, is having a positive impact on the effectiveness of leadership at all levels and, ultimately, students' improving achievement.

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

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the use of assessment by:
 - ensuring lessons provide even more consistent opportunities for students of all abilities to undertake challenging work
 - developing questions and ways of managing responses so all students have to think more deeply about key ideas
 - marking to provide more useful feedback to students.

- Improve students' workplace skills by:
 - engaging more effectively with all parents, particularly in order to improve attendance
 - increasing the opportunities students have to take responsibility by enabling them to contribute more positively to improving their school
 - developing students' cultural awareness through increased opportunities to interact with those not strongly represented in the school.

- Improve attainment so that it is at the national average by:
 - ensuring all the school plans take full account of the need to promote equal opportunities and are focused on improving the progress made by all students
 - producing an improvement plan that effectively communicates a longer-term vision for the school
 - ensuring senior leaders have clear roles and responsibilities.