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Mr Lonergan
Headteacher
Gateacre Community Comprehensive School
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Dear Mr Lonergan

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Gateacre Community Comprehensive School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I and Kath Harris, additional inspector, inspected your school on 16 November 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please forward our thanks to your students for their help during the inspection.

Since the last inspection, there has been a reorganisation of the senior leadership team with five new postholders appointed to replace former ones. The school moved to new purpose built accommodation in September 2011.

As a result of the inspection on 26 May 2010, the school was asked to tackle 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 satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The senior leadership team fully recognise the need to accelerate and sustain improvements to students' pass rates for attaining five GCSE A*-C grades, including English and mathematics, and particularly for boys who join the school at and below Level 4, and for students known to be eligible for free school meals. In particular, the percentage of students attaining grades A* to C in mathematics requires further improvement. Tracking and monitoring systems are now robust and lead to a wide range of interventions. Current progress tracking and scrutiny of Year 10 and Year 11 students' work indicate an improving trend at Key Stage 4. In 2011, the percentage of students at GCSE gaining grades A* to A improved. Pass rates improved across a number of subjects, including science and information and communication technology (ICT). Pass rates for GCE A levels in the sixth form are in line with high national averages and the progress that students make is good and sometimes outstanding.

September 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Attendance continues to improve and currently is over 94%. This improvement reflects more effective monitoring and tracking systems. Form tutors are now integral to the monitoring of attendance and this change has had significant impact in raising the profile of attendance and on students' attitudes. The school has done much to improve transition from the primary schools so that students with a history of poor attendance are known and strategies are in place when they are enrolled in Year 7. Links with parents and carers are stronger and include small group sessions and information events. Senior managers have ensured that the ambiance of the new buildings is welcoming and positive for all students. The large atrium is a focal point for the whole-school community and facilitates a seamless mixture of staff and students in the mornings and at breaks. The atrium atmosphere espouses a sense of maturity, engagement and enjoyment. Students' behaviour in classes, open learning areas and around the school has improved. Students expressed exceptional pride in the quality and imposing facilities of their new buildings and are grasping with increasing enthusiasm the new learning opportunities offered.

During the monitoring visit, inspectors undertook a series of short visits or learning walks, to a wide range of subjects to assess the learning and progress students made. Inspectors found behaviour to be good with no disruptions to lessons observed. Good teaching was observed in English, modern foreign languages, humanities, science and the arts. Tasks set were challenging and students responded with enthusiasm. In these lessons students made good progress. Lessons in mathematics were generally satisfactory but too often lacked pace and students, while compliant, were less engaged. The learning walks also confirmed a greater use of ICT in teaching but little direct use of ICT by students was observed. In some subjects there is infrequent guidance given to students as to what they need to do next to improve. There was also too much variability in the quality of marking of students' work. In English, assessment practice and teachers' marking were good. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has a stronger focus on developing literacy and numeracy and in building communication and learning skills to enable stronger foundations for the challenges of Key Stage 4 work. Care, guidance and support systems and practice have been strengthened through a greater emphasis on the role of form tutors and improved linkage between academic, vocational and pastoral provision.

The reorganisation of responsibilities and portfolios for senior managers has enabled the development of more robust tracking and monitoring systems and better data collection and analysis. Consequently, senior managers, middle managers and staff have a greater focus on improvement. Very good systems are in place to evaluate attendance and the impact and consistency of application of the attendance intervention strategies. However, the headteacher acknowledges the need to further strengthen school systems and approaches to accelerate and sustain better outcomes for students. The contribution of the specialism in performing and creative arts has been strengthened. In particular, these subjects have benefited from outstanding new facilities. They are using these to improve teaching and learning, and in developing specialist student training in, for example, theatrical and performance lighting technology. Excellent links, to support such activities, have been developed with external partners. Trained students in lighting technology now support music and theatre performances by external groups as well as internal productions. The

headteacher and senior leaders have managed the transition into new buildings very well. This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them at that point to be secure and meeting requirements.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise standards and increase the progress that students make by:
 - building on recent improvements in teaching and learning so that most lessons are consistently good or better
 - embedding the better practice evident in many examination classes more fully throughout the whole school
 - engaging and challenging students more fully to further minimise disruption in lessons
 - improving the consistency and accuracy of assessment, and make better use of assessment information, including marking, so that students are clear about what they need to do to improve.

- Improve attendance by:
 - building more productive partnerships with the parents and carers of those students most at risk
 - making coming to school for these harder to reach students a more rewarding, worthwhile and positive experience
 - employing greater rigour in challenging poor attendance.