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18 November 2011

Ms H Mills  
Headteacher  
Burnt Mill Comprehensive School  
First Avenue  
Harlow  
Essex  
CM20 2NR

Dear Ms Mills

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Burnt Mill Comprehensive School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Michael Stanton, additional inspector, and I inspected your school on 17 November 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 6–7 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 outstanding progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the last inspection, a number of staff have left the school and several new teachers, including three members of the senior leadership team have been appointed. Heads of department have been replaced by seven heads of faculty. A new leader of the governing body took up her role in 2011. The school is fully subscribed. The school will convert to an academy on 1 December 2011.

The school's improved capacity for improvement is reflected in the dramatic rise in attainment achieved over the past two years. More than 70% of Year 9 students attained the expected standards in English and mathematics in 2011. In Key Stage 4, almost all Year 11 students attained at least five A\* to C grades. Based on their below average starting points, this represents outstanding progress. The proportion of students attaining five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics more than doubled to 56% in 2011. Results in science have increased to well above the national average. Current assessment data indicate that this will be sustained in

2012. Students make good progress in the school's specialism of performing arts and attain results that are similar to national averages. These remarkable improvements are a testimony to the clear, coherent leadership of the headteacher. Aply supported by senior and middle leaders, she has raised the aspirations of all students. The quality of teaching and learning has improved by regularly monitoring lessons and making staff fully accountable for the achievement of all students. Decisive action has been taken to tackle inadequate teaching but inspectors found that a small residue remains.

Observations by inspectors confirmed the school's view that teaching and learning is good in more than half of all English, mathematics and science lessons. All teachers are observed annually by the headteacher and the deputy, and are given clear feedback on their strengths and areas for improvement. Lesson monitoring is more proportional so that less effective teachers receive the support and challenge they need to improve. Formal observations are complemented by routine visits to lessons and additional support provided by the most effective teachers. Senior leaders have welcomed the effective support provided by the local authority to resolve staffing issues and secure better quality teaching.

Teachers have good relationships with students and manage their behaviour well. In the best lessons, teachers' high expectations and extended periods of time for independent study aid the progress of more-able students. Teachers highlight the requirements of examinations and what students should include in their work to gain their target grades. Most teachers plan tasks to suit students' different abilities but often teach the whole class the same work at the same rate, so not all students are fully challenged and some less-able students struggle to understand what they have to do. Marking is more regular and includes a range of techniques to provide students with good advice on what they need to do to meet their targets. Very few teachers take the opportunity when marking to challenge students' poor presentation of their work.

Statutory requirements relating to safeguarding students and equality of opportunity are fully met. A revised single equality scheme has been established and is regularly monitored by the governing body. This needs more time to embed to ensure equality of opportunity is fully achieved. Senior leaders' analysis of assessment information shows that a higher percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals attained five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics this year, but less impact was made in narrowing the gap between all students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

John Mitcheson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science from satisfactory to good by ensuring that:
  - planning of tasks and activities for different age groups of students builds on their prior attainment and matches their ability
  - teachers challenge students, particularly the more-able ones, to think more for themselves and reach their full potential
  - marking is of a consistently high quality and includes guidance for improvement.
  
- Develop the lesson observation process by:
  - increasing its coverage and the frequency of observations
  - improving the quality of analysis of the findings to inform actions for improvement and self-evaluation more effectively.
  
- Ensure that statutory requirements related to equality of opportunity are fully met by:
  - finalising and implementing the school's single equality scheme, ensuring that it gives full coverage of the general duties that apply to the three equality strands of gender, race and disability
  - ensuring arrangements for assessing the impact of the policy on students, staff and parents
  - ensuring that actions to promote equality are drawn together and monitored closely by senior managers and the governing body.