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Mr S Calvin
Headteacher
Barr's Hill School and Community College
Radford Road
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Dear Mr Calvin

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Barr's Hill School and Community College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 December 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to staff and students.

As a result of the inspection on 8 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 outstanding progress in making improvements and outstanding progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

There have been no significant contextual changes since the inspection.

Although attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 remains lower than the national averages, the gaps with national performance are closing rapidly. Significant improvements were made in both attainment and progress in 2011. Several attainment indicators moved above national averages. The number of students gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics rose from 29% in 2010 to 47% in 2011.

Importantly, the progress being made by all groups of students dramatically improved in 2011. Overall, given students' well below average starting points on entry, the progress made by all students was outstanding. Nearly all groups of students, including those from potentially vulnerable groups, exceeded the ambitious targets set for them and made better than expected progress, many significantly so, in both English and mathematics. In particular, the performance of those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs



and/or disabilities far exceeded that made nationally, representing outstanding progress.

The school uses data very effectively to track students' progress and identify where interventions are required. These are tailored to meet individual students' requirements, with excellent commitment evident from both staff and students to ensure that improvements are made. For example, the 'Sunday Pizza' support sessions attracted large numbers of students and staff. Students speak very positively of the efforts made to help them to achieve and the quality of the support provided.

Another factor in the improvements evident is the effectiveness of the whole-school strategy to reinforce literacy and communication skills across the curriculum. This is vitally important for many students, a large proportion of whom are learning English as an additional language. Staff have been trained in the use of consistent approaches; the application of these, together with a range of suitable interventions and extra provision for targeted students, has brought about significant improvements.

The behaviour of students is consistently good in lessons and around the school. In the majority of lessons seen, students' progress was good. Students were actively engaged in their 'Inspire-deep learning' activities programme with considerable enthusiasm. There were extensive opportunities for them to work effectively in teams, build co-operation skills and demonstrate independence in learning. In particular, opportunities for them to solve problems and apply new learning in different contexts were very effectively created. Increasingly, students are developing good skills in assessing their own and each other's work, using clear criteria. In a Year 8 art session, students considered the ideas for mosaic work suggested by their peers and provided constructive feedback based on the lesson's objectives. This, in turn, prompted good reflections on their own work and how this might be improved. In a Year 11 English literature lesson, students confidently assessed their own and each other's work against clear criteria, demonstrating excellent understanding of how to achieve the higher grades. The quality of marking has improved significantly; students comment on the depth of this and report that the level of challenge posed to them to achieve highly is considerable.

The school's development plan is clear and detailed; it identifies challenging targets and timely milestones to ensure the impact of actions that are aligned to key priorities. Monitoring and evaluation of impact of intervention activities is sharp and rigorous. Under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by a strong leadership team, a consistent focus on raising achievement and driving improvement has been maintained. This is not lost on students who comment favourably on improvements made across the school. They express confidence that they believe they can succeed and achieve highly.

The role and effectiveness of middle leaders has improved considerably since the inspection. Careful attention has been paid to the continuing professional development of all staff, including middle leaders. External consultancy support has been highly effective here in establishing a consistent focus on improving teaching and learning, and reinforcing the significance of team leaders in driving this. In particular, middle leaders demonstrate increased confidence in monitoring and assessing progress and learning. Lines of accountability have been firmly established through regular, purposeful meetings with senior leaders. Both curriculum and year leaders maintain a sharp focus on raising achievement. This drive to build capacity has advanced improvements in teaching, learning and self-evaluation. The approach has enabled all leaders to have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Importantly, this has greatly improved the school's capacity for further improvement.

The development of the school's specialism has supported the broadening of the curriculum and strongly reinforced students' future work-related skills. In particular, the engineering specialism has led to significant increases in opportunities for work-related learning through a variety of work placements. Links with industry have been strengthened and extended to good effect.

The school has made good use of external advice from both the local authority and external consultancy support to ensure this has maximum impact on improving outcomes for all 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

Judith Matharu
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Further improve attainment by:
 - developing and consolidating students' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
 - increasing the proportion of students who achieve a higher GCSE grade in both English and mathematics
 - building students' capacity to apply their skills, think independently and solve problems effectively in lessons.

- Improve the use of assessment to raise achievement by ensuring that all teachers:
 - assess students' progress during lessons to match work more closely to their needs and understanding
 - mark student' work regularly and provide constructive feedback to them on how to improve further.

- Develop middle leaders' role in systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of provision and performance.