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Ms Carol Jones
The Headteacher
Hornsey School for Girls
Inderwick Road
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Dear Ms Jones

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Hornsey School for Girls

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. I should be grateful if you could also pass on my thanks to the students, the chair of the governing body, the assistant director of the local authority and the headteacher of Woodside High School who gave up their time to speak to me.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a complete overhaul of the staffing structure. There has also been a reduction in the school's planned admission numbers.

As a result of the inspection on 26 and 27 May 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 is rising steadily with 58% of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics in 2011. Attainment in science was significantly below the national average, but was above average in the specialist arts subjects. The proportion of students gaining the top grades at GCSE is increasing, and gaps in attainment between different groups of students are narrowing. The rate of progress has accelerated for some groups of students, but has been relatively slow for those who speak English as an additional language. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve less well than similar groups of students nationally. However, leaders and managers have identified

these students and any other groups at risk of underachieving in 2012, and are targeting these through appropriate intervention strategies.

The proportion of good and better teaching has increased significantly since the previous inspection. Teachers plan lessons well and make good use of available information on students' prior attainment and individual needs to secure improved progress. Lesson planning identifies different groups of students, and lessons now incorporate activities which cater for students' different learning styles. Teachers use a range of strategies to challenge students and in lessons where students are taught in mixed-ability groups, they empower more-able students to facilitate the learning for those who require extra support through carefully planned group work.

Leaders and managers have built up an accurate profile of teachers' strengths and areas for development and a comprehensive programme of professional development has been implemented, including the use of coaching. Inspectors concurred with senior leaders' judgements during joint lesson observations. As a result of training in lesson observation, senior and middle leaders can correctly identify the essential components of good and better teaching. In the best lessons, inspectors saw teachers making better use of questioning to test for students' understanding throughout the lesson, as well as providing opportunities for students to assess their own progress as well as that of their peers. In these lessons, additional adults in the classroom are deployed more effectively. The quality of marking is variable, but in many cases it is regular and informative, identifying at what level students are working and exactly what they have to do to move up to the next level. Many students respond positively to teachers' comments and act on them. Opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills are promoted through home learning activities and students can access these through the school's managed learning environment, which the school plans to develop further during the course of this year.

The curriculum has been adapted to address the needs of the cohorts of students coming through the school, and students say they appreciate the four pathways available to them. The introduction of AS-level courses for the more-able students in Key Stage 4 serves as a challenging aspect of enrichment and uptake is increasing. For students entering Key Stage 4 with lower levels of attainment, a personalised programme of study has been created which comprises of five core GCSE subjects and intervention programmes specifically targeting individual students' needs. The school has rightly targeted lower levels of literacy in Key Stage 3 and meets the needs of these students through appropriate intervention strategies. Specialist staff have been appointed to work specifically with students who have low levels of literacy or who speak English as an additional language and have low levels of language use. Leaders' and managers' decision to review the curriculum structure has facilitated the setting of English according to ability and has created two special 'nurture' groups where students with lower levels of literacy receive good support with the aim of empowering them as learners. It is not yet possible to measure the impact of this intervention on students' outcomes; however, students say they have gained in confidence since joining these groups.

Leaders, managers and members of the governing body have demonstrated a good understanding of barriers to progress and have implemented effective plans to address these, for example in science. Self-evaluation processes are rigorous and accurate, and monitoring and evaluation processes are embedded. Leadership has strengthened at senior and middle level and the smarter use of data is driving through school improvement. The headteacher has effected change in many key areas: the staffing structure has been re-modelled and now offers better value for money; the curriculum has been restructured and most middle leaders have been brought onto the extended senior leadership team.

The school's specialist subjects make a positive contribution to students' outcomes and provide several opportunities for students to engage in extra-curricular activities. This in turn increases their confidence and self-esteem. The school has benefited from work carried out with external organisations that have provided expertise in the use of data and assessment systems, as well as carrying out a review of the science faculty. The local authority will support the school with a review of the sixth form in January 2012.

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 Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the proportion of good teaching so that most students make good progress by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - use the information available on students' prior attainment and individual needs to match activities closely to the learning needs of students of different abilities, in particular those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with the potential to reach the highest levels
 - assess students' learning through questioning and dialogue during lessons, using the information to refocus teaching and to help students understand what they are learning
 - use marking effectively so that students understand what they are doing well and how to improve
 - ensure that there are more opportunities to develop independent learning skills and use of new technologies.
- Implement plans to develop the curriculum further, making the most of enrichment opportunities and cross-curricular links, so that it motivates and meets the needs and interests of all students.