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9 December 2011

Mr C Sampson  
Headteacher  
Thornton Grammar School  
Leaventhorpe Lane  
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Dear Mr Sampson

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Thornton Grammar School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 December 2011 with Marie Cordey and Keith Worrall, additional inspectors. I appreciated that you and your senior leaders made time to meet with me on 7 December 2011 to discuss and plan inspection activities. Thank you for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to the students who gave up their time to meet with us and who expressed their views politely and articulately.

The current headteacher, who was deputy headteacher in the school previously, was appointed to the substantive post in September 2010. There have also been changes to the senior and middle leadership team since the last inspection. There was a significant increase in the admission numbers to Year 7 in 2010, which means that particular year group is larger than others. Year 11 students were on work experience when the monitoring visit took place.

As a result of the inspection on 20 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 inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The percentage of students achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE rose by 10 percentage points to 80% in 2011, which is broadly average. The percentage of students achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, dipped slightly in 2011 and the gap with the national average has widened. The percentages of students making expected progress in mathematics and English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 are well below the national average but improving; improvement is faster in English than mathematics. Progress in the sixth form is broadly satisfactory with some variation between subjects.

September 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

There was an increase of two percentage points in the proportion of students achieving two A\* to C grades in science in 2011, but this remains well below the national average. There was also an increase in the percentages of students achieving A\* to C grades in physics and chemistry. Despite this, attainment in science at Key Stage 4 has not improved rapidly enough since the last inspection. The school has made a number of changes and while these have the potential to increase students' progress and attainment, the full impact of these has not been seen. There have been changes to the management structure with a new head and second in the department; in addition, the range of science qualifications has been increased to be better matched to students' abilities and interests. More progress has been made at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4.

The curriculum has been revised and there are increased numbers of students choosing to study triple science at GCSE. The school reports greater student enjoyment and engagement in science lessons. The department is working to improve the levelling of students' progress further to ensure accuracy of teachers' assessment. In 2011, these assessments indicated that the percentages of students achieving Level 5 and above as well as Level 6 and above, increased to be more in line with similar schools nationally.

Improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. While there has been improvement and this was seen in some lessons observed during the monitoring visit, there remains too much variation in the quality of teaching within and between subjects. Students did not make sufficient progress in a small number of lessons observed. There has not been fast enough progress in accelerating students' learning by increasing the proportion of teaching that is good or better. The inspection team undertook lesson observations and learning walks, observing 29 teachers. Some were undertaken jointly with senior leaders, which verified the accuracy of their judgements. The school has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching but there remains too much inconsistency, particularly in the specific aspects of teaching that were identified at the last inspection. Data are not used consistently well enough to plan lessons to take account of students' prior attainment or to set appropriate challenge. The checking of students' understanding in some lessons is at an early stage of development. There have been improvements in the quality of marking but it is not always up to date or does not always provide clear guidance about the next steps students need to take. In the less effective lessons, the pace of learning was slow and not all students were aware of their targets or what specifically they needed to do to improve.

In the more effective lessons there were high levels of engagement and enjoyment based on teachers' enthusiasm, good subject knowledge and high expectations. Examples of good learning were seen in lessons where activities were sharply focused and challenging. In these lessons, students were very clear about what they needed to do to improve and how to achieve a higher level. One example of good practice, seen in the physical education department, was the use of videos of students practising hockey skills in order to assess their own and their peers' progress. Another example was the detailed planning of effective

learning activities for students in a music lesson. However, there are not enough opportunities to share the good practice that exists in the school.

The headteacher and senior leaders have articulated a clear vision for improvement and have made effective use of reviews and support from external organisations; working with the local authority, National Strategies' consultants and the Bradford Partnership. For example, after the Bradford Partnership review in November 2011, the school took immediate action to address the areas for development identified; in particular, strengthening the role of the middle leaders in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The speed of this response is indicative of the developing capacity of school leadership. However, it is too early to see the impact of this action on the quality of provision. Although senior leaders have designed a more-focused professional development programme, improvements so far to the quality of teaching and learning are not sufficiently consistent or secure. While the school has made some progress in raising standards, there has not been rapid enough progress in improving attainment in science at Key Stage 4 and in increasing the percentage of students achieving five A\* - C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. Attendance is above average and the sports specialism enriches many students' enjoyment of school. Students value the increased opportunities for personal development provided through the specialism, such as working towards the junior sports leaders' award.

The head of the sixth form has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and is implementing changes to improve the rate of student progress. The curriculum has been adjusted so that it better meets the needs of all students and monitoring of students' performance is more closely linked to the analysis of data leading to focused and early interventions with students at risk of underperformance. The managerial role of the head of the sixth form has been revised but the strategic leadership role is less well developed.

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,

Linda Tetik  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## Annex

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

- Improve performance and students' progress in science throughout Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning so that at least 75% is judged to be good and better by:
  - ensuring that all teachers use the available data about students' progress to provide lessons that have a consistently high and appropriate level of challenge
  - making sure that marking is used consistently to tell students how to improve their work
  - making sure that teachers check regularly if students have understood the work and not just completed the tasks set.
- Improve the quality of evaluation throughout the school by:
  - making sure that current systems of monitoring, together with any new interventions and procedures, are rigorously evaluated for the impact that they have on students' progress.
- Improve the quality of outcomes in the sixth form by:
  - ensuring that the leadership of the sixth form is able to monitor, evaluate and drive forward proposed changes so that all students achieve as well as they can.