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14 December 2011

Mr R Wilkinson
Biddick School Sports College
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NE38 8AL

Dear Mr Wilkinson

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour:
monitoring inspection of Biddick School Sports College**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 December 2011 with Robert Birtwell, additional inspector, and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Given that the visit was unannounced, I am particularly grateful to those staff who gave up their time after school to meet with us. Please also pass on my thanks to those many students who were happy to talk with us at various times during the school day, sharing their experiences of school life.

Since the last inspection, the senior leadership team has undergone significant restructuring. Following the retirement of three deputy headteachers, four assistant headteacher posts have been created, two of which are to lead the English and mathematics subject areas. The school is also in the process of restructuring the way in which it manages student support services. An additional provision, for a very small number of students on the autistic spectrum, has also been established at the school and the school admits students from across the local authority to this facility.

As a result of the inspection on 12 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 satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement. The effectiveness of the school in improving pupils' behaviour is good.



Unvalidated data for 2011 shows that students' attainment at the school continues to rise. In the GCSE examinations in 2011, over four-fifths of students gained five or more good grades at GCSE. This was a significant improvement on the results in the previous year and in line with the national average for this measure. Similarly, the proportion of students reaching this benchmark when English and mathematics are included also rose and was equal to that seen nationally. From their broadly average starting points on entry to the school, this represents satisfactory learning and progress overall. However, students made better progress in mathematics than they did in English and in science, and the proportion of more-able students gaining the highest grades of A and A* at GCSE across a range of subjects was below that expected given the prior attainment profile of students completing Year 11 in 2011.

Leaders and managers have taken a number of significant steps to improve outcomes for students. Behaviour has improved in lessons and around the school site. Attendance levels are rising and, although girls' attendance remains lower than that of boys, inspection evidence confirms that students' attendance to school is currently higher than at the same period in the previous year. The curriculum meets the needs of different groups of students more effectively, contributing to the significant rise in students' average point scores at Key Stage 4 in 2011. Staff and students appreciate greatly the improved environment arising from the completion of the great majority of building work at the school site. The analysis and use of assessment information to provide support for targeted groups of students in English and humanities have improved. However, work to extend the use of assessment information in order to more effectively identify and address underachievement across the school is at an early stage of development.

Senior leaders have established a culture of self-review and continuous improvement which is widely shared by staff at all levels. There is an ambitious programme of professional development, tailored to the needs of staff with different areas of responsibility and is increasingly responsive to the outcomes of monitoring activities. Management structures have been improved and a regular programme for reviewing the work of the school has been established. Middle leaders receive valuable support and guidance to help them to develop the skills they need to carry out their roles more effectively. However, the focus of recent activities to evaluate teaching and learning has been to ensure that the skills of leaders and managers continue to develop and to provide information about generic strengths and weaknesses across different subject areas. As a result, the school is unable to provide clear evidence of the impact of its work to improve teaching over time, in the form of an improving profile of lesson observations across the school or in the impact of actions taken to improve the practice of individual teachers.

A range of activities and teaching approaches, to better engage students in their learning, were seen during the inspection. Students say they enjoy opportunities to work in pairs or in small groups and to discuss their learning with their teachers and other students. However, learning and progress in the majority of lessons seen during the inspection were satisfactory because teaching was not consistently

effective in meeting the needs of all groups of students in the lesson. For example, there were few opportunities for more-able students to access tasks at different points, to explore their ideas in more depth through discussion or to work on tasks in-line with their target grade. The most common approach was for the class to move at the same rate through the same task, slowing the rate of progress of some students. The quality of verbal and written feedback to students varies greatly. In the best examples, students receive valuable feedback which helps them to improve. However, inspectors also saw work that was rarely marked, where marking was of a more cursory nature, or where feedback comments did not identify more precisely how work could be improved.

Students report that behaviour across all aspects of school life is much improved and evidence collected by inspectors supports this view. Students' behaviour around the school site at social times and in the changeover between lessons contributes strongly to a calm and orderly atmosphere, despite a number of 'pressure points' in corridors at certain times. Students say lessons are only very rarely disturbed by poor behaviour and that the school's systems to manage behaviour in lessons are clear, understood by all and applied consistently by staff. Bullying is rare and students are confident that it will be dealt with very well when it occurs – a small number of students were able to describe to inspectors how the school had dealt with issues that had affected them personally. The impact of the student support centre can be seen in the extent to which exclusion is very rarely used as a sanction by the school. Staff who work in the centre are increasingly proactive in the ways in which they support staff across the school in managing any behaviour issues.

Leaders and managers have identified and accessed external support in line with school improvement priorities, including for judging the quality of learning and progress in lesson observations. The school is also at an early stage of developing links with a high-performing partner school in another authority. The specialism of sport has a high profile in the school community and is active in a number of initiatives both within and beyond the school including, for example developing leadership skills in young people.

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

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the proportion of good or better teaching in order to raise levels of achievement by:
 - making more effective use of data to inform lesson planning, thus ensuring that work meets the needs of all students, in particular the most able
 - focusing marking on showing students how they can improve their work
 - ensuring that all lessons are well managed and challenging in order to better engage students in their learning
 - the regular monitoring of the quality of teaching.

- Ensure that leaders at all levels are involved in effective monitoring and evaluation by:
 - building systematic review systems into the school's development planning
 - ensuring that all middle leaders are trained to monitor and evaluate effectively.