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12 January 2012

Mrs L Rodham
Headteacher
Wellfield Community School a Specialist Mathematics and Computing College
North Road East
Wingate
County Durham
TS28 5AX

Dear Mrs Rodham

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour:
monitoring inspection of Wellfield Community School, a Specialist
Mathematics and Computing College**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 January 2012 with Clive Petts, 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 the many pupils who were happy to talk with us at various times during the school day, sharing their experiences of school life.

Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed, who took up her post on 1 January 2012. New appointments have been made to lead the English and mathematics subject areas. There has been some realignment of the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team in line with the needs of the school, particularly in relation to teaching and learning and to the management of pupils' behaviour. The number of pupils on roll at the school has fallen since the last inspection and, as a result, the overall numbers of staff at the school have reduced.

As a result of the inspection on 21 January 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. The effectiveness of the school in improving pupils' behaviour is satisfactory.

Unvalidated data show that the proportion of pupils gaining the equivalent of five or more good grades at GCSE has continued to rise and was significantly above the

national average in 2011. Similarly, the average and total point scores of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 have also risen sharply since the last inspection. A range of GCSE-equivalent programmes, such as those in sport, construction and science has made a significant contribution to this. However, achievement across a wide range of GCSE courses has declined since the last inspection. For example, the proportion of students making the expected three levels of progress in the specialism of mathematics is well below the national average and shows little sign of improvement. As a result, a smaller proportion of students leave school with five or more good GCSEs including in English and mathematics than is seen nationally and this gap is not closing fast enough. This underachievement affects most groups of pupils more or less equally, although is more significant for middle-ability pupils and for those known to be eligible for free school meals. Relatively few high-attaining pupils achieve the highest grades on their GCSE courses. Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress broadly in line with similar pupils in other schools.

This pattern of underachievement was replicated in lessons seen by inspectors during the inspection. There were no lessons where pupils' achievement was better than satisfactory. A number of factors were seen to contribute to slowing pupils' progress in lessons:

- Teachers' expectations were not high enough to ensure that learning in lessons was well matched to pupils' target grades. As a result, although pupils were often occupied working on tasks, they were not engaged in activities designed to capture their interest and to provide challenging learning experiences.
- Weaknesses in the promotion of students' speaking and listening skills meant that few pupils contributed effectively to class discussions. This was reinforced by a tendency for teachers to spend too long talking or to do too much thinking for pupils.
- Too great a reliance on the teacher for help and support slowed the pace of learning and did not develop pupils' resilience and independence.
- Weaknesses in the design of lessons meant that learning activities were not sufficiently well adapted to meet the needs of all groups of pupils in the class. As a result, the pace of learning for more-able pupils or for those pupils requiring additional support or structure was too slow.

The quality of oral and written feedback to pupils varies greatly. In some subjects, such as English, pupils receive useful guidance to help them to improve their work. In others, work is rarely marked or the comments provided indicate only where work has been completed satisfactorily, or where it is incomplete or missing. Overall levels of attendance have continued to decline. Recent disruption to the support provided through the education welfare service has affected the extent to which the school has worked effectively to reduce the proportion of students who are persistently absent from school.

Pupils say that behaviour rarely disturbs learning in lessons. Evidence collected during the inspection supports this view, although in many lessons, pupils' passivity reduces the quality of learning, or off-task chatter results where activities do not engage or challenge sufficiently. Pupils' movement around the school site is generally calm and orderly, although there is some boisterousness in corridors at lesson changeovers or at social times. Behaviour is usually well managed by staff and pupils say that most teachers apply the school's systems for managing behaviour well, although some inconsistencies remain. Ancillary staff report that the great majority of pupils are polite and considerate and pupils' behaviour on buses at the beginning and end of the school day is well regarded. The overall number of exclusions has risen since the last inspection as a result of a policy of zero tolerance agreed with the governing body by the previous headteacher. The new headteacher has instituted a range of measures, including changes to the use of in-school 'seclusion' facilities, in order to reduce the use of exclusion as a sanction.

The new headteacher has an ambitious vision for the future of the school and its pupils. The impact of strategies to bring about rapid improvement in English and mathematics is already beginning to be seen. Leaders and managers are clear about what needs to be done to increase the pace of improvement across the school and have rightly prioritised improvements to teaching and learning and the raising of expectations as central to this. The headteacher recognises that existing self-evaluation of the quality of provision at the school is too generous and takes too little account of outcomes for pupils. Procedures to support the professional development of teachers are in place, including through the sharing of good practice, both formally and informally. However, there is a need for greater rigour in the evaluation of teaching in order to improve the proportion of teaching that is good or better rapidly. The school's specialist status is providing a focus for the improvement of mathematics at the school.

The local authority has provided valuable support for school improvement. Building on work carried out as part of the National Challenge programme, the school has continued to receive further support through the work of advisers and consultants in key subjects. Since the last inspection, support provided through links with a partner school has contributed to building leadership capacity. Local authority support for the governing body has strengthened its understanding of school performance and provided valuable guidance during the process of appointing a new headteacher.

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 January 2010

- Improve pupils' achievement and maximise their enjoyment of learning by:
 - eradicating the remaining instances of poor behaviour in lessons and around the school by raising expectations of what is acceptable behaviour and by ensuring that all teachers apply the school's behaviour policy and procedures consistently
 - systematically identifying and sharing the good practice that already exists in the school in order to increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching
 - ensuring teachers' assessment and feedback are consistently good throughout the school and always lets pupils know what they need to do next to improve their work.