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Mr Douglas Lawson  
Headteacher  
Aylesford School – Sports College  
Teapot Lane  
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Dear Mr Lawson

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Aylesford School – Sports College**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 February 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please extend my sincere thanks to the staff and students I visited in lessons, and to members of the senior and middle leadership team, teachers and students whom I interviewed.

In 2011, the school restructured its senior and middle leadership team of both English and mathematics. Although new staff have been appointed, some vacancies still exist in the English department. A new deputy headteacher has been in place since September 2011.

As a result of the inspection on 30 September–1 October 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.

### **Achievement of students at the school**

On entry to the school, student attainment is very low. Since 2010, owing to effectively targeted interventions, including additional subject support in English and mathematics, 35% of Year 11 students achieved at least five A\* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. This is a marked increase on the results achieved in the previous years. However, despite this increase, which places the school above the minimum floor standard, attainment remains well below national figures. The school's internal tracking and monitoring systems of current Year 11 students'

progress indicate that the proportion attaining A\* to C GCSE grades in English and mathematics is set to rise, thus confirming an overall improving trend.

The progress students make in their GCSE subjects against their starting points is satisfactory overall. However, within this, there is marked variation and students in some mathematics and English lessons were observed making inadequate progress with students making good progress in a few mathematics lessons. Through more effective tracking of students' sub-levels of progress, a coaching pack shared with parents and carers, additional workshops and Saturday clubs, the school is rightly targeting those students who underachieve. In particular, the school has targeted those who have gaps in their knowledge and skills in English and mathematics.

Moreover, the school is aware that the achievement of those students with special educational needs, recognised as needing support, is not improving as quickly as that of their peers in Year 11.

The majority of students are keen to learn when given well-structured opportunities in lessons. In some instances, even when lessons are uninspiring, students are responsive. Most are respectful of their teachers and other adults. Students make good progress where the learning objectives and activities are in line with their abilities and help to consolidate their knowledge and skills. For instance, one Year 8 mathematics lesson developing students' use of 'expression skills' involved clear assessment opportunities, and evaluation of others' work against success criteria, together with targeted questioning by the teacher. These enabled students to extend their learning.

### **The quality of teaching**

In the large number of lessons observed in mathematics, English and science, where teaching was only satisfactory and in some cases, even inadequate, students were not fully challenged or supported in their learning through the tasks they were set. Despite teachers now having clear detailed information on students' prior attainment, coupled with greater moderation of students' course work, the majority were not using this to plan their lessons. This resulted in the same activities and pace of learning for all, regardless of students' prior knowledge, skills and ability. For instance, in one Year 9 English lesson, the tasks set were too simple and involved downloading material from the search engine, cutting and pasting pictures. This did not offer all students, especially more-able students, sufficient opportunities to develop their extended writing and literacy skills. In addition, in many lessons, teachers' questioning does not always sufficiently challenge middle-ability and more-able students.

Assessment activities, including peer- and self-assessment, that check learning are used inconsistently across the core subjects. In particular, teachers do not check the knowledge and skills that all students are acquiring before moving on to the next activity, so that students either do not understand the purpose of the task, or find the activity insufficiently challenging. Marking of students' work does not always give students detailed feedback on how to improve, and some teachers do not ensure

that students have corrected their work before moving on to the next stage of learning. Most of the students interviewed knew their learning targets, but a significant minority did not know what they needed to do specifically to meet these. However, the school's senior and middle leaders are now ensuring that monitoring of interventions for individual students is more focused so that they can successfully meet their targets, especially in Year 11.

The development of students' basic skills, in the main, is at early stages. Students are encouraged to read during daily 'mentor sessions' in tutor groups. These, together with 'literacy and numeracy challenges' and regular Master Classes in the Learning Resource Centre, are leading to greater awareness amongst staff and students of the need to develop these skills. Some good practice in promoting literacy is emerging through collaborative approaches adopted by subject heads. For instance, mathematics and science schemes of work reflect common glossaries across both subjects. In physical education lessons, profiling key words helps consolidate students' understanding and spelling skills. In addition, the school is gathering data on students' reading ages so as to better target those who need support with their comprehension skills. However, in English lessons, students do not demonstrate secure knowledge of accurate spelling, paragraphing and punctuation in their writing skills, and many are not developing the important referencing skills they need for dictionary work and independent learning. Across the school, there is too much variability in students' work in relation to layout, handwriting and neatness, and in general, standards of presentation are low.

The school has made good progress in implementing homework, and this is reflected through the availability of after-school study areas for students who are unable to study at home, and much valued by them. Homework planners and a common homework timetable across the school are ensuring that a greater number of students now submit homework more regularly.

### **Behaviour and safety of students**

Most students are courteous and well behaved. However, in lessons where activities are not sufficiently absorbing, or they have not understood, some lose attention, chatter and misbehave. Behaviour over time is improving and is broadly satisfactory as a result of the sanctions and rewards system in place. Through a sustained focus on behaviour, previous high levels of exclusions are reducing, in particular, for disabled students and those with special educational needs. Students' attendance has improved and is now slightly above average, with the attendance of specific groups, such as those who are recognised as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, also demonstrating an improving trend.

### **The quality of leadership and management of the school**

Changes in staffing during the previous year have had a negative impact on students' outcomes in English and mathematics, as evidenced through the 2011 GCSE outcomes, as these were not in line with the school's targets. Nevertheless,

greater staffing stability this year, and more rigorous tracking of students' achievement by senior and middle leaders, are showing signs of improving levels of progress. In addition, the school, in prioritising the variable quality of teaching, is targeting coaching activities for individual teachers, so as to accelerate students' levels of attainment. Owing to the revised leadership structure, senior leaders are now more effectively supporting middle leaders of English, mathematics and science in developing their leadership capacity and assuming their responsibilities. Middle leaders value the external professional development opportunities they have; however, this has not led to staff routinely identifying and sharing good teaching practice across subjects. Although senior and middle leaders monitor the quality of teaching, they do not focus sufficiently on the importance of tasks and assessment activities in accelerating the progress of students of all abilities. This has led to variability in the quality of learning and is not raising teachers' expectations of students or the need to extend students' knowledge and skills.

Members of the governing body effectively support the school but, as yet, have not developed close links with middle leaders and their subjects, which restricts the information they have available with which to evaluate success.

Local authority support for the school through the National Challenge Programme has ceased but officers provide support for the school through paired lesson observations and regular reviews of the school's improvement planning. Since the last inspection, the headteacher has worked effectively to raise achievement. Senior leaders are now prioritising with urgency the quality of teaching and assessment, and strengthening further the capacity of middle leaders. Changes in the vocational curriculum are leading to higher levels of progress in the school's sports specialism. Critically, more rigorous tracking of underachieving students and supported interventions, especially in English and mathematics, are leading to improvements in students' behaviour and fostering more positive attitudes to learning.

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

Meena Wood  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September–October 2010**

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:
  - implementing a focused approach to improving literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
  - ensuring that homework makes a more effective contribution to pupils' learning in all subjects.
- Improve the consistency of teaching by:
  - ensuring that all middle leaders identify and disseminate good practice within their subjects
  - building on the training already undertaken to ensure that learning tasks are always closely focused on pupils' prior attainment.