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7 March 2012

Mr P Banks
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Banks

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Roding Valley High School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 March 2012 with Sandra Teacher, additional inspector, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to the governor, students, teachers and the members of the senior leadership team who gave their time to talk to us or join us for inspection activities.

Since the last inspection there has been a restructuring of the senior and middle leadership teams and some routine staff changes.

As a result of the inspection on 18 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.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Over the last three years, there has been an improving trend in results, closing the gap between the school's results and the national average for the proportion of students gaining five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics. The school's tracking data predicts further significant increases for students in the current Years 11 and 10. On some comparisons of academic performance, the school is significantly above average.

The rise in results has been quicker than the rise in the proportion of students making expected progress. The legacy of slower than average progress is taking longer to be rectified, but again the gap with the national average is closing. There

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has been particular improvement in students' achievement in mathematics. Additional support is available to students and extra curriculum time has been allocated for the core subjects, for example extending the school day to provide an extra mathematics lesson.

Leaders and teachers now know students' progress. A detailed tracking system is used and the progress of each student in each subject is now monitored regularly. The curriculum has been adapted to provide a better match to students' needs and abilities. Middle leaders monitor the progress of students in their areas of responsibility. This is all an innovation since the last inspection. Students know their challenging targets and there has been good promotion within the school for students to respond to the increased expectations of them.

The quality of teaching

There has been an increase in the quality of teaching. The school has successfully confronted inadequate teaching through a combination of coaching, support and staff changes. It has identified appropriate staff who work effectively to assist colleagues. Middle and senior leaders now monitor the quality of teaching. Inspectors carried out lesson observations alongside senior leaders and generally agreed their grades. The school judges that around two thirds of teaching is at least good. Teaching is characterised by good relationships and effective behaviour management. Students told inspectors that behaviour has improved over the last two years. There is a very strong emphasis on understanding the level at which students are working and helping them to understand how to get to the next level. Sometimes this can be overdone rather than engaging students in exciting and interesting activities. Teachers set up good opportunities for students to work together co-operatively and teachers now routinely provide students with challenge.

There is good marking in some subjects, especially in French where the department uses its own tracking system, students set their own targets and marking forms the basis of a dialogue between teacher and student. This has not been replicated in all departments. Marking across the school is inconsistent. Too often, it is no more than a tick or brief comment rather than advising students on their next steps in learning. In some lessons, teachers carefully monitor how well students understand their work by frequent checking, targeted questioning and opportunities for students to self-assess. However this is not apparent in all lessons.

Teachers' planning consistently makes reference to how lower attaining and higher attaining students will make progress in the lesson. This has greatly enhanced teachers' thinking regarding student progress. However, not all teachers use the improved information about students' progress and ability to adapt tasks to meet students' individual needs. Not all use questioning to explore students' understanding or to extend and deepen their thinking

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students told inspectors that behaviour has improved noticeably over the last two years. Inspectors found the school to be a calm and orderly place. Classrooms are well-ordered, creating good opportunities for uninterrupted learning. Attendance has improved since the last inspection.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

Governance has improved greatly since the last inspection. The governing body now fulfils its role by asking challenging questions. It is fully equipped with data and members have been trained in understanding it so they can ask these questions. Detailed examples were given of how the governing body has challenged and supported the school and brought about change.

Since the last inspection, the school has benefitted from targeted support in science and mathematics from the local authority. This support has now decreased in response to the school's increased capacity.

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

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise standards of attainment across the school so that the proportion of students attaining five A* grades at GCSE, including English and Mathematics, is above the national average by ensuring that teachers:
 - identify and provide additional support for underachieving students
 - prepare students to develop their skills appropriately for examinations in mathematics and science
 - challenge and support students to gain the target minimum grades in all subject areas.

- Increase the proportion of good teaching and learning across the school by making sure that all teachers:
 - ensure that activities fully engage and motivate the students in their learning
 - use assessment information effectively to inform their planning so that the work is matched to the learning needs of individual students
 - agree and share the best practice in teaching and learning.

- Develop the governing body so that they can become more effective in their evaluating and monitoring roles by:
 - ensuring targeted training is provided on a regular basis for governors so that they are fully able to undertake their roles and responsibilities
 - increasing the rigour of their review processes of all school policies and statutory responsibilities
 - ensuring that governors are fully involved in the evaluation and monitoring of developments in the school.