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Mrs Julie Churcher
Headteacher
Aldworth Science College
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Dear Mrs Churcher

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour:
monitoring inspection of Aldworth Science College**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 14 March 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Could you also please pass on my thanks to the students, staff and governor who gave so freely of their time.

The context of the school has not changed significantly since the previous inspection and there have been few staff changes. The senior leadership team has been extended with the addition of an assistant headteacher for mathematics and leadership responsibilities distributed across a wider range of managers. The headteacher was seconded to a local school last year for two terms and has been back in Aldworth since January 2012. There is a continual programme of refurbishment of the school buildings. A new creative and media arts area is now open and the school is about to take over a new performing arts centre.

As a result of the inspection on 15 and 16 November 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 the effectiveness of the school in improving pupils' behaviour is good.



Achievement of pupils at the school

Recent concerted efforts to address underachievement have resulted in an increase in the number of Year 11 students gaining five A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics. In 2011, over half of the students gained these grades, up from a third in 2010. Information on students' performance provided by the school indicates that this upward trend is set to continue as the GCSE outcomes already gained by the current Year 11 students are higher than last year. Students continue to do well in science and standards are also improving, reflecting the impact of the college's specialist status in science.

Students' prior attainment when they start the college is below that found nationally. The progress they make from these starting points is improving as behaviour and attendance improve and students are more engaged with their learning. Better support and specialist intervention for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is also improving their progress. In lessons visited, students were working well and making progress where the teaching was designed to meet their individual needs. Where the quality of learning was not as strong, this is often because students are not engaged and motivated by the content and activities in lessons. Learning is also slow where lessons are pitched at one level and do not meet the needs of all the different abilities in the class. Some teachers are helping to improve students' literacy skills through activities such as reading aloud to the class and extending vocabulary, although this is inconsistent across the curriculum.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching and learning is improving where there is a sharper focus on learning outcomes, although this is not yet consistent across all lessons. Students say they now have a much clearer understanding of what they are going to learn in their lessons. By the end of the best lessons they are also now clear about the levels of success they have achieved. Many teachers are making better use of effective strategies to improve the participation of students who might be disengaged with their learning. As a result, behaviour is improving and lessons are calmer and there is little evidence of disruptive incidents in class. However, some students still drift off task where the lesson is over-directed by the teacher. Progress is slower where the pace of teaching drops and there are limited opportunities for students to be active and involved in their learning. The quality of oral feedback given to students during lessons is now much better as teachers are becoming more focused on how their students learn. However, they do not always extend this by using appropriate questioning techniques that challenge individual students.

The quantity and quality of marking and assessment of students' work is variable. In the best examples, students are provided with clear information about the next steps for improving their work. This good practice is not implemented consistently and opportunities are missed to set up a dialogue with students that encourages them to respond positively to teachers' comments.



Tighter monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning has highlighted the areas for improvement that have a direct impact on raising achievement. Students have noticed these improvements in teaching and they say that lessons are better and their learning has improved.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are quite certain that behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. They assert that their lessons are no longer disrupted by poor behaviour from a few students. There is still some evidence of inattention and off-task activity where students are not engaged with their learning and teachers do not give students sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. Students are now coming to college more regularly and more rigorous absence management strategies mean that attendance is improving. The new behaviour management policy is increasingly effective and well understood by the students as they know the expectations teachers have of their behaviour. The impact of these new strategies can be seen in the rapidly declining levels of exclusions.

Students' attitudes to learning are improving along with their behaviour in lessons and around the college. There are still some small pockets of inappropriate behaviour that the college is working to address, such as students using improper language outside of lessons.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

In responding to the issues raised in the previous inspection, the school leadership has effectively prioritised the tracking of student performance and strengthened the role of monitoring teaching in raising achievement. Its understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in lessons is now being used more effectively to plan for and implement improvements. The impact of this work is illustrated by the improvements in GCSE outcomes. The pace of improvement in current students' learning and attainment is starting to speed up, although there is still work to be done in English and mathematics. The capacity of the school to maintain this improvement is demonstrated by the better progress being made by current Year 11 students.

The college understands the need to develop and plan a curriculum that promotes students' spiritual and cultural development and improve their understanding of other cultures, religions and beliefs. All staff are clear about their central role in supporting and caring for their students, some of whom are very vulnerable. The governing body are now more skilled in analysing information on student performance and have a clearer view of achievement. Representatives from the local authority have given the school effective support that has been useful in helping the school to respond to the inspection issues.



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

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

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

- Further increase the rates of progress and personal development of all students by:
 - consistently using strategies to improve the participation of those students who remain disengaged and ensure behaviour improves around the college
 - ensuring that all lessons are tightly focused on learning outcomes
 - consistently using assessment information to ensure that every student is set work that is closely matched to their personal need, making sure that students get regular feedback about how well they are doing and precisely what they need to do to reach the next level or goal.

- Refine the school's self-evaluation processes to ensure that monitoring and evaluation are systematic, based on wide-ranging evidence of the impact of provision on outcomes and the use of benchmarking against other schools nationally.

