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Mrs N Waters
Headteacher
Droitwich Spa High School and Sixth Form College
Briar Mill
Droitwich Spa
WR9 0AA

Dear Mrs Waters

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Droitwich Spa High School and Sixth Form College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 23 May 2012 and for the information which you provided during and prior to the inspection.

Since the previous inspection, there have been several staff changes. Of particular significance are the recent appointments of a second deputy headteacher and six new appointments to the science department with effect from September 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 5 October 2011, the academy 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 academy is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Since the previous inspection, the academy's data collection systems are more robust and detailed. The academy now collects data from teachers on at least eight occasions throughout the key stage. There has been improvement across the board in this year's examinations. From a low point in 2009, the academy has now shown an increase in outcomes at the end of Year 11 for the third consecutive year. This includes the proportion of students who gain five or more passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. In 2010, this measure was 49% and it has now increased to currently stand at 57%. Anticipated results from the summer show that this is expected to rise further to around 62%. In mathematics, the proportion of students who have gained at least a C grade at GCSE has risen from 52% in 2009 and is likely to be close to the academy's target of 65% in the 2012 examinations. Other measures show a similar trend of improvement. The academy has also

introduced the measure of how many students make three National Curriculum levels of progress in a key stage. This again shows an upward trend, especially with regard to mathematics where the measure is expected to show that over 70% of students will achieve this, compared to 52% in 2011. Students with disabilities and those who have special educational needs also make improved progress in line with other students. This shows that the progress made in this area for improvement has been good since the previous inspection.

Eight lessons were observed during this visit in the core subject areas of English, mathematics and science. The quality of teaching ranged from outstanding to satisfactory. This also reflected the progress made by students in these lessons. In the best lessons seen, the teaching was dynamic and exciting. It used topics which engaged the students to a high level, so that all were extremely keen to contribute. Questioning by the teacher was challenging and well targeted so that it developed learning and students' thinking skills very well. Overall, in the lessons seen, the quality of questioning by the teacher correlated well to the progress made by students in lessons. Planning for lessons shows that teachers are now fully aware of the abilities and learning needs of the students in their class. However, there are some occasions when this knowledge is not fully translated into tasks which meet the needs of all students effectively. Leaders now monitor a range of groups of students, including those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who have identified behavioural needs. As a result, they are able to provide additional support as required. The improved data systems also allow leaders to analyse the success of this support and amend or change it as appropriate.

All lessons were observed jointly with a member of the academy's management team. In discussions after the lessons, there was strong agreement between the observers about where there were strengths and where improvements were needed. This accuracy is the result of the well-targeted continuing professional development since the inspection. Training has also had a significant impact on the quality of teaching throughout the academy. Lessons now all have clear learning objectives which are understood by the students. Feedback in books generally provides students with areas for improvements, although this is not consistent across all lessons. During lessons, teachers continually assess the learning which is taking place. This is done through a variety of methods. These, include: 'mini-plenaries' where the lesson is paused and questions asked, to ascertain how much has been understood by students; students holding up fans with different coloured sections to indicate if they understand, do not understand or are unsure; use of mini-whiteboards for students to share their thoughts with the class, among others.

Progress has been made in lines of accountability. Heads of department are now held to account, by senior leaders, for the progress made in their subjects. In turn, teachers are also more accountable to the heads of their department for the performance of their students. Regular 'narrowing the gap' meetings, between heads of department and line managers, are held to ensure that all students are making expected progress in all areas.

Extra support is now provided for students who need it through the 'inclusion centre'. As a result of this, the number of exclusions has decreased significantly as students are now more effectively supported internally. Also, due to increased engagement in lessons, the number of students who attend each day is above average and those who are regularly absent is below the national average.

When the academy initially submitted its action plan after the previous inspection, it was judged by Ofsted not to be fit for purpose. It has since been revised and the changes have remedied the shortcomings. The academy has sourced external support and, as a result, staff now receive training in specific areas of the school's work, particularly with regard to the quality of teaching, which has shown significant improvements as a result. Leaders have been pro-active in seeking out good practice within the academy and sharing it among colleagues.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Muir
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2011

- Increase the rates of progress for all groups of students and in particular students' progress in mathematics by:
 - raising students' attainment in all subjects
 - ensuring consistently high expectations of students' potential for achievement
 - meeting the academic needs of all students and in particular those with identified behavioural needs.

- Improve the quality of teaching and use of assessment by ensuring:
 - lessons have a consistently clear focus on and high expectations of students' learning, thereby maximising progress for all groups
 - teachers regularly assess students' levels of understanding during lessons and modify tasks and activities when appropriate to ensure sufficient challenge for all groups of students.

- Increase the school's capacity for sustained improvement by:
 - sharpening the actions taken to improve teaching as a result of its own monitoring and evaluation
 - extending the current opportunities for sharing good and outstanding practice in teaching and use of assessment.