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Mr Chris Williams
Principal
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Stantonbury
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Dear Mr Williams

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Stantonbury Campus

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 14 September 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to students, members of the governing body and the local authority.

Since the previous inspection, a number of teaching staff have left the school and a new vice-principal and two assistant principals have been appointed. Leadership roles have been refocused and new job descriptions drawn up to strengthen accountability and consistency in order to build a collegiate team.

As a result of the inspection on 7–8 December 2011, 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 is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

The Principal has established clear pathways for improvement and has set a good pace for change. New systems for quality assurance have been introduced, with clear lines of accountability. These are focused on improving the quality of teaching and on raising attainment. His clear vision for the school has been shared effectively with all staff, who have embraced it wholeheartedly, and as a result, their morale is high. Strategies for tackling weaker teaching have been implemented effectively and there is a clear ambition to ensure that all lessons are good and that all students achieve well. This is reflected in the school's commitment to 'excellence, independence and opportunity'.

The students' rate of progress and achievement are rapidly improving. In 2012, Year 11 students gained a range of accreditation, including higher GCSE

grades in English language and science. Just over half of the students achieved five or more higher level passes, including English and mathematics – a record for the school. This represented a 16 percentage point increase on the previous year. Performance in mathematics rose by 16 percentage points and English by 13 percentage points, narrowing the gap between boys and girls. At advanced level, students achieved well in health and social care and business studies but were less successful in art and design and mathematics. Achievement in the performing arts, the school's specialism, is a strength of the sixth form, with over 60 public performances a year.

Since the previous inspection, the school has strengthened assessment systems for collecting and analysing data. Teachers use this information increasingly effectively to plan lessons which cater for students' learning needs, and to identify those learners needing extra help and support. Consequently, current Year 11 students are securely on track to meet the school's challenging targets with just under two thirds of students predicted to gain five or more higher level passes at GCSE.

Overall, the proportion of well-taught lessons has risen since the previous inspection and the task for the school now is to embed new approaches thoroughly in every class. For example, a reading recovery strategy has been introduced for a number of students during the past six months and, as a result, students' average reading age rose by 10 months. This was due to teachers ensuring students have a variety of opportunities to practise and consolidate their literacy skills and through effective one-to-one support.

Lesson observations and the school's records show that a greater proportion of students than previously are beginning to accelerate their progress in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) as these are incorporated more in a wider range of lessons. Nevertheless, it is too early to judge the full impact of recent actions.

Planning for learning is a developing strength of the school. Teachers demonstrate a much improved knowledge of the level at which each student is working and the type of learning activities required to achieve the next level. Marking is more regular than previously and students have welcomed the use of motivational 'stickers' when teachers mark their work. Nevertheless, the quality of feedback given to students on how to improve their work remains inconsistent and does not always clearly explain how the next steps can be achieved. Similarly, teachers' questioning does not always promote students' thinking skills, particularly in stretching the thinking of those who are more able.

Relationships are positive and teachers treat students with respect. As a result, students are well motivated to work hard. For example, in a Year 11 drama lesson, students were enthusiastically engaged in analysing a poem about 'Young Offenders'. Here, they worked in groups on interpreting their characterisation of roles, and made good progress. Students have welcomed the steps taken by the

school to make the campus a safer place. Also, the recent introduction of a 'code of conduct, rewards and sanctions' policy, together with a new dress code, have been positively received.

The local authority, working closely with the Principal and members of the governing body, has driven forward strategies to help accelerate students' progress and improve the quality of teaching. The local authority statement of action meets requirements and offers structured support for the school. The school has also received well-considered training and advice from a National Leader for Education. This support has a positive effect on the outcomes for students at Stantonbury.

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

David Scott

Additional inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently address students' inadequate achievement, particularly but not exclusively in mathematics, and narrow the gaps in the performance of different groups of students by:
 - increasing the proportion of good and better teaching
 - ensuring that teachers make more effective use of assessment information held about students when planning lessons so that their learning needs are met
 - providing more opportunities for creative teaching and challenge to meet the needs of more-able students
 - developing students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT across subjects.
- Make the best use of targets in relation to students' achievement by:
 - exploiting the benefits of the systems for tracking students' performance which are now in place
 - expecting every teacher to check that all students understand what they are learning at various points during lessons
 - improving the quality of marking of students' work so that they all clearly understand the level at which they are working and what they have to do to move up to the next.