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Mr M Kerr
Headteacher
Noel-Baker School
Bracknell Drive
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Derby
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Dear Mr Kerr

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Noel-Baker School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 3 October 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please thank the Chair of the Governing Body for taking the time to talk to me and the students for their help during my visit.

Since the previous inspection, the school has moved into new buildings. Eight teachers have left and the four staff who were previously on maternity leave have returned to work. Three newly qualified teachers have been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 22 February 2012, 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 students' achievement.

At the end of Key Stage 4, the school's 2012 unvalidated data show an increase from 35% in 2011 to 42% in the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades in both English and mathematics. This is above the government's minimum expectation. In addition, 88% of students achieved five or more A* to C grades in their GCSE examinations. This rise in students' attainment is because of many successful new initiatives to improve the quality of students' learning, and more robust monitoring and evaluation by the school's leaders. The school now has rigorous tracking systems which quickly identify any student at risk of underachieving. Strategies have been introduced to ensure that students understand how to improve their work, and each student is set aspirational targets for all subjects. Tutor groups have been reshaped and aligned closely with students' needs

in English and mathematics to provide extra support. This enables high-quality interventions from form tutors.

The school has appointed an achievement coordinator who oversees students' achievement across the school, writes individual action plans based on each student's data and aligns this to personal and group interventions. Additional staff now teach English and mathematics to students in Years 9, 10 and 11. This has meant class sizes have been reduced and staff are used flexibly to work with specific groups of students according to their needs; for example, working with students who have not achieved as well in a controlled assessment. Learning mentors have been introduced to work with students and focus on specific learning programmes.

Behaviour and attendance have greatly improved. The new school building enables staff to maintain an unobtrusive presence around the site. There are no longer bells ringing to signal the end of lessons. Instead, at lesson changes, break and lunch times, students calmly and maturely move around the site. Students are courteous and considerate towards everyone. Students reported that low-level disruption to learning is rare; they feel safe and have no concerns about bullying of any kind. One boy stated that he had moved to this school because of previous bullying. In his former school he could not 'be himself' and in this school he could. The improvement in behaviour is because of the 'root and branch' approach taken by the whole school. A new behaviour policy explains clearly the high expectations for students' behaviour and these are reflected in equally high expectations of staff. The management of behaviour is consistent. Well thought-through sanctions ensure staff are supported and encouraged to tackle any low-level disruption more effectively. Classroom doors are open and, during the inspection, a calm and purposeful atmosphere pervaded the school. Effective additional support is provided for students at greatest risk of exclusion through the highly skilled interventions of staff in the 'LEAP' unit. In the unit, students learn to manage their behaviour and are gradually reintroduced back into school. Parents spoke highly of how this helped their child calm down and settle to learning.

Attendance has improved and is currently just below the national average. The proportion of persistent absentees has reduced. The single entry into the building allows staff to swiftly identify any lateness and follow this up. Consequently, students are punctual. Every absence is followed up rigorously and effectively, and parents and carers kept informed.

Teaching observed during the inspection was at least satisfactory. In some lessons, it was good and, occasionally, outstanding. This is because the school has taken robust action in identifying and tackling weaker aspects of teaching. Teachers' planning has improved. Teachers now use assessment information more effectively to plan a series of increasingly challenging tasks for students of all levels of attainment and with a wide range of social and emotional needs. Teachers identify students' previous knowledge more clearly, and more accurately take into account students' different starting points.

Students' written work is marked frequently and mistakes are identified. Feedback from teachers and guidance on how to improve is detailed. However, opportunities to consolidate and practise these improvements do not always occur. Teachers' marking to improve the quality of students' literacy and numeracy skills is in its early stages of development. Strategies for sharing good practice are well established and staff enjoy collaborating on teaching and learning.

The headteacher, senior leadership team and staff are determined to improve the quality of education for their students. Training has been used effectively to increase staff confidence and the sharing of good practice is used more effectively to improve weaker teaching. Monitoring and evaluation systems have been tightened up and this ensures that leadership and management at all levels have a secure view of the quality of teaching and students' progress. As a result, all staff are held to account for the progress of students.

The effective support provided by the local authority has been carefully tailored to meet the needs of the school. The local authority's action plan is fit for purpose, provides a clear and measurable set of actions linked to the school's needs, and is implemented effectively.

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012

- Minimise disruption to learning in lessons by:
 - ensuring there is clarity about the school's behavior management policy and consistency from all staff in its implementation
 - helping all teachers to plan engaging learning activities of appropriate challenge for the range of needs in class.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - showing teachers how to use assessment information to plan a series of increasingly challenging tasks
 - making sure students' written work is frequently marked, that mistakes are corrected and students provided with guidance on how to improve
 - ensuring teachers use marking to help students improve their literacy and numeracy skills
 - using the good practice that exists to improve the quality of teaching where it is weaker.

- Improve attendance so that it reaches the national average for the 2011–2012 academic year and reduce the frequency of persistent absenteeism.