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Caroline McKenney, Principal  
The Netherhall School  
Queen Edith's Way  
Cambridge  
CB1 8NN

Dear Mrs McKenney

**Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to The Netherhall School, Cambridgeshire local authority.**

Following my visit to your school on 25 April 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012.

**Evidence**

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy principal, three assistant principals, the directors of Key Stage 3, 4, learning and assessment and the lead teacher for teaching and learning, three representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of students in Year 7. I looked at students' progress records and evaluated the school action plan. In addition, you provided a tour of the school to familiarise me with your school.

**Context**

Since the section 5 inspection four members of staff have left the school and all have been replaced with suitably qualified specialists. The school is considering conversion to academy status.

**Main findings**

Your action plan identifies what the school will do to address the main priorities for improvement identified in the November inspection. Inspectors asked the school to

increase the proportion of good teaching in order to promote good progress for all groups of students, improve behaviour and increase the impact of leadership and management at all levels.

Senior leaders and governors are reviewing the implementation of the action plan regularly and you are responding by modifying what needs to be done. The plans show in detail what the school will do and who will do it, but the intended impact is not always clear. Success criteria is not sufficiently focused on specific gains in students' skills, knowledge and understanding or their attitudes to learning and school life. For example, to improve the quality of teaching the plan rightly states that work set for students needs to be pitched at the right level. What remains unclear is precisely how the school will know. This limits governors' ability to hold the school to account.

At the time of the inspection you did not have effective systems in place to check on students' progress. This is improving following the appointment of a data clerk. You now track the performance of different groups of students regularly which is helping you to identify and address their needs more quickly, including students for which the school receives additional funding. Already, although different groups do not yet progress equally well gaps are closing in some subjects. For example in English earlier intervention in Year 7 for students supported by the pupil premium is narrowing the gap between their achievement and more advantaged students.

You are aware of the need to use other information to assess students' starting points accurately. The sixth form is setting a good example. Effective liaison with feeder schools, from which the majority of students in the sixth form are recruited, is helping students choose courses better matched to their needs than in the past. More systematic monitoring of students' attendance in the sixth form is having a positive impact on their progress and attitudes to learning. However, discussion with a group of Year 7 students indicated that the school's transition to a single site for all year groups is not completely cohesive yet. The school is too reliant on the views of staff to know if actions such as discrete zones for different year groups are effective.

You are monitoring teaching more rigorously and this is helping to increase the proportion of good teaching. Leaders are using the Teacher's Standards confidently to evaluate teachers' performance and identify good practice to share through a new 'buddy' programme. You have increased the challenge given by senior staff to middle leaders through 'keeping in touch' meetings as you recognise that the effectiveness of these staff is critical in getting the school to good.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- make sure that success criteria for improvement priorities are measurable, and are clearly linked to improving students' achievement and attitudes to learning and school life
- engage students, parents and carers in shaping the school's 'getting to good' strategies and in evaluating the impact
- work with middle leaders to ensure their action plans and implementation align with the school's revised success criteria.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided well-targeted support by advising the school about action planning and data management, by training governors in the use of the pupil premium and by funding visits to two leading schools in Kent. The Principal maintains links with educationalists locally through work with the university and her role as chair of the Cambridge headteachers group.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**