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Mrs G Goodwin
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Goodwin

MONITORING INSPECTION OF CHURCHMEAD SCHOOL'S INADEQUATE SIXTH FORM

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 16 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the sixth form was judged to be inadequate in February 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

I observed 4 sixth form lessons, talked with all the Year 13 students, and scrutinised various documents. I met with the senior management team, a group of teachers and representatives from the local authority. The feedback session included governors, and representatives from the local authority, the Oxford Diocese and the Learning and Skills Council.

Context

Churchmead School secured voluntary aided status in September 2002, and at the same time launched its sixth form provision with the opening of purpose-built accommodation. In the Ofsted inspection of the school in November 2002, the 11 – 16 part of the school was judged to have serious weaknesses, with the newly

opened, small sixth-form as satisfactory. There were 23 students in September 2002; in 2003 there were 46, and in 2004 the cohort was 40. The Ofsted inspection of the school in February 2005 judged the school to be providing a satisfactory standard of education overall, 'though it provides unsatisfactory value for money due to an inadequate sixth form that fails to attract sufficient students'. The school decided to put on hold any curriculum offer for Year 12 for September 2005, and to ensure that Year 13 students could complete their courses. Thus, just 5 full time students in Year 13 make up the current sixth form. The school is preparing a bid to achieve media arts specialist status in 2006.

Achievement and standards

Given the low numbers of students in the sixth form, comparisons with national data are not meaningful. The previous inspection judged that there were too many unclassified results at AS level in 2004. It remained the case in 2005 that at both AS and A level there were too many students not achieving pass grades. However, in Business Studies, Human Biology, Physical Education, English Literature, Drama, Information and Communication Technology, General Studies and Media Studies a number of students achieved A – E grades which indicated sound progress when measured against their attainment at GCSE.

The 2006 target grades for current Year 13 students are suitably challenging; their good progress in lessons indicates these grades are realistic.

Personal development and well-being

The Year 13 students have positive attitudes to their studies and the sixth form, and thus their attendance this year has been good. In lessons, their attitudes were consistently positive to the teachers and to one another; there was an obvious sense of enjoyment in advanced level work and the students demonstrated good independent and collaborative learning skills. They are clearly developing attributes and skills that will contribute to their future economic well being, both through the taught curriculum and through their involvement with the 11 – 16 age range and the wider community. They have served as millennium volunteers and enjoyed work experience placements. The students are active in leading the school council and support younger pupils, for example with their reading.

Judgement

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

- Attendance is too low – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

Good teaching and learning was a consistent feature of the 4 lessons observed. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and they convey their love of subject enthusiastically. Planning and resources are of a high quality, relationships are good, and teachers know in detail the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Very good progress occurred when skilful and inclusive questioning elicited high level

oral responses from students, for example in Drama when discussing the staging of a Greek play and in Biology when studying the main organs of the body and their associated blood vessels. In a class of just one student, he commented: 'The one-to-one tuition allows me to do things I would never get a chance to do in a larger group'. Assessment and marking are accurate, regular and supportive to students in indicating to them what they need to do to improve.

Students' progress is clearly enhanced in many lessons by the small group size. However, both students and staff observed that they sometimes miss the intellectual dynamics and exchange of ideas which occur in larger sixth form groups. The teachers have some opportunities to talk with other professionals about their post-16 teaching, but the school needs to ensure that they are not working in isolation, particularly in preparing students appropriately for both their coursework and final examination papers.

The breadth of curriculum offer remains poor, and a number of students commented that they had not been able to pursue the full range of courses that they originally chose to do. The allocation of time to courses is adequate, but the curriculum does not satisfactorily provide for key skills and physical education. Students study religious education within their General Studies programme. Wider curriculum enrichment is hampered by the small size of the sixth form. Common-room facilities are adequate, although the students could make more of this area for their own benefit. The students have good access to spaces for private study and make positive use of their time for independent learning.

Year 13 students have a tutor who provides satisfactory care and support, although the school has yet to identify one member of staff who has a detailed overview of the students' academic progress, pastoral well being and their progression routes beyond school. The school needs urgently to clarify the lines of responsibility and accountability for one part-time student.

In discussion with the inspector and the headteacher, the students articulated thoughtful and challenging views on the current and future provision of sixth form education at Churchmead, opinions which the school has recognised need to be harnessed.

Judgement

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

- The curriculum is poor; it neither attracts sufficient students nor provides an adequate range of enrichment activities to promote improved key skills, including academic skills and social skills – inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The school's action plan in response to the inadequate sixth form judgement is satisfactory, with appropriate success criteria, timelines and procedures for monitoring and evaluating impact. The difficult decision to not admit students into

Year 12 for September 2005 was taken after robust and detailed discussions between the senior leadership team, governors and the local authority. At the same time the school has ensured that Year 13 students are provided with good teaching; their individual and collective learning needs are being well met within the constraints imposed by a small number on roll. There is a common understanding that the sixth form continues to provide unsatisfactory value for money and that the current financial investment in post-16 provision is not sustainable.

Supported by the local authority, the school plans to develop a strategic partnership with a neighbouring school to provide a range of sixth form courses on the Churchmead site from September 2006. Suitable detailed planning is proceeding, but requires more urgency from all parties if it is to come to fruition for current Year 11 students.

Judgement

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

- Leadership and management in the sixth form are unsatisfactory – satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority's commentary in relation to the governors' action plan is well judged, and trenchantly identifies the background and possible developments for successful post-16 provision at Churchmead. Additional funding to develop vocational provision has been allocated to the school. The local authority, governing body and the diocesan board have worked together effectively with the school's senior leadership team to identify a positive way forward in the best interests of the students they serve.

Main Judgements

Progress since the sixth form was identified as inadequate – satisfactory.

The quality of the local authority's statement of action is satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- involve the Year 13 students more effectively in keeping under review current provision and in future planning for the sixth form
- strengthen procedures for monitoring students' academic progress and well being
- ensure that the leadership team, governing body and local authority focus immediate attention on detailed planning for September 2006.

The headteacher and governors will notify HMI, no later than 30 April 2006, as to the plans for sixth-form provision at Churchmead School from September 2006.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Learning and Skills Council, the Head of Learning & Achievement for Windsor and Maidenhead, and the Oxford Diocesan Board.

Yours sincerely

Roy Blatchford
Her Majesty's Inspector