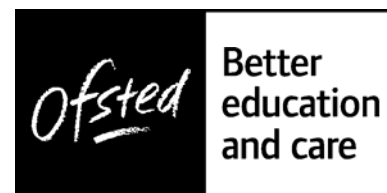


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11 July 2006

Dear Mr Chamberlain

### **OFSTED MONITORING OF SCHOOLS WITH NOTICE TO IMPROVE**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I visited your school on 28 June 2006, for the time you spent on our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my particular thanks to those students and staff who met with me and to your vice chair of Governors for the time she gave.

Having considered carefully all the evidence presented by the school and the local authority, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress overall on the issues identified at the last inspection.

As a result of its inspection in December 2005, the school was asked to look at four matters: improving the provision in core subjects; raising achievement in the core subjects in Key stages 3 and 4, intervening early to ensure that students develop literacy and numeracy skills; improving the opportunities for able students to tackle more challenging work; and strengthening the contribution of middle managers to school improvement.

The school has rightly focused on improving learning and teaching and has made good progress in this area. Led by a forceful and energetic senior leadership team (SLT), a raft of measures have been implemented which focus on what and how students learn. Middle leaders have conducted lesson observations and have themselves been observed teaching. Staff have had written evaluations of strengths in their teaching and points for development. Support has been provided by school staff and by LA consultants to help those who need to improve. The school's records of these checks on teaching indicate that its challenging targets for 96% of teaching to be at least

satisfactory and 56% to be good have been met. My visits to a sample of classrooms confirmed that the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory. The school's drive for more consistent behaviour management has been effective. Pupils appreciate the change in classroom climate that enables them to learn and creates a fairer system of rewards and consequences.

Through a range of strategies, including feedback to staff from pupils and in-service training, teachers are being helped to tailor work and teaching styles to better meet their students' needs. Areas for development in English, mathematics and science have been identified through internal departmental reviews; heads of department are implementing necessary changes albeit with strong support and intervention from the SLT. The students commented on the change in the style of teaching and the way that lessons have been made more interesting and engaging, for example by the use of group work and information technology.

The school has taken robust action to improve literacy and numeracy by appointing staff with experience and expertise to lead these areas. Developmental work in literacy, for example, is appropriately dovetailed with other developments in teaching and learning. Provisional results from the 2006 national tests indicate that achievement in mathematics and science has risen substantially. There are no equivalent test results available for English at present but departmental progress checks indicate that the higher targets set by the school are likely to be surpassed. The school's use of a commercial scheme to track students' progress has the potential to drive standards higher. Good progress has been made in this area.

The school has well advanced and suitable plans to enable more students to 'fast track' to early GCSE entry. A range of strategies including booster classes, mentoring by senior staff and interviews with the headteacher have also proved both fruitful and productive and good progress has been made in providing more challenge for students. Nevertheless, the school reports that there is too little differentiation in classrooms to cater routinely for students of different ability and lesson observations during my visit confirmed this.

The school and Local Authority consultants have taken robust action to foster greater accountability and improve the rigour in which heads of department approach their role. As a result, all staff are aware of what needs to be done and some have embraced with relish the new requirements to monitor and report on standards and provision. There is still some way to go to gain consistency of approach, and some resistance in key departments to the additional work that such accountability brings. Linking staff across departments to share good practice, has proved influential in spreading good practice. Progress in this aspect has been satisfactory.

The school has received strong support from the local authority. Its statement of action is clear, covers all areas required and focuses on practical solutions to best support the school. The measures taken have dovetailed well with the school's own action plan and struck a good balance between support and challenge.

The pace of change has been rapid, staff have worked extremely hard and the benefits of the improvements are palpable. The school now needs to take stock of these gains and take steps to embed the changes into everyday practice.

Yours sincerely

Maggie Hollingsworth  
Her Majesty's Inspector