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19 October 2006

Dear Mr Daunt

OFSTED MONITORING OF GRADE 3 SCHOOLS

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 October 2006, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the staff with whom I met and also to the group of pupils who gave of their time to meet with me.

As a result of the inspection in September 2005 the school was asked to address four areas for improvement: to raise achievement, particularly in English; to improve the quality of teaching; to promote opportunities for pupils to learn independently and actively; and to use the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation to inform planning for improvement and to hold managers to account for the performance of their areas of responsibility.

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.

There has been a clear determination from the headteacher and senior staff to drive forward the improvement agenda. Many staff were bruised by the September 2005 inspection but have rallied to accept the gauntlet laid down by the headteacher. There is a rapidly improving culture of self review and improvement at the school.

Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and improved use of pupil progress data to identify and intervene with underachieving pupils have enabled the school to raise standards and improve the rate of progress made. The provisional results from 2006 national tests at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE show marked improvement, notably in English at Key Stage 3 and in the proportion of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE; about 75% of pupils now achieve these higher GCSE grades. Progress made by the pupils in the six part lessons observed was good overall and mirrored the quality of teaching.

The school has worked well in identifying what is needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning. A schedule of lesson observations in partnership with local authority staff has helped identify staff's training and support needs and has also served to train senior and middle managers in monitoring lesson quality. These have been suitably complemented by in-house and external training tailored specifically to the school's needs. A staffing restructure and adjustments to job descriptions have usefully raised the profile of teaching and learning for middle managers. A teaching and learning group has been well led by a 'fast track' teacher and has very recently produced a clear and innovatively presented policy on teaching and learning; this gives a suitably high priority to the progress pupils make in lessons.

Most of the lessons observed during the inspection visit were of good or better quality and none were inadequate. Active engagement of pupils in self and peer assessment are routinely planned for in the helpful common lesson planning template. Pupils are regularly made aware of their current level of work and what they need to do to improve. In a few lessons, however, lesson objectives were restricted to descriptions of what the pupils would do rather than outcomes of their learning. Pupils were extremely positive about the improvements they have seen in lessons. They cite self and peer assessment; knowing one's own level and target; the use of interactive white boards; the promotion of research and independence in learning; and more fun in lessons generally as examples of these changes.

The senior leadership team has made the imperatives for improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards clear to staff. The school's plans are suitably focused on these areas and the six quality standards issued by the headteacher to heads of department give drive and coherence to the school's planning. Subject action plans are based on these standards. Middle managers are being held to account and are rising to the challenges set down by senior staff. In acting upon these they recognise their roles in supporting staff to bring about change. However, they are less clear when robust challenge might be necessary. The school's systems for monitoring and evaluation are systematic and there are good examples of the school acting upon the results of its evaluations.

The school recognises that its revised practices need to be embedded further for these improvements to be sustained and it has set itself challenging targets to ensure that it remains focused on further improving the quality of its provision.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Eric Craven
Her Majesty's Inspector