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23 May 2007

Dr K Simmonds
The Executive Headteacher
Hall Cross School
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Doncaster
South Yorkshire
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Dear Dr Simmonds

Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your school on 22 May, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information that you provided before and during my visit. Would you also pass on my thanks to the governor that I spoke with and extend particular thanks to the students I met at lunchtime. They were a great credit to themselves and the school.

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

As a result of the inspection in September 2006, the school was asked to.

- Improve the progress of students at Key Stage 4, especially the less able students.
- Improve the Key Stage 4 curriculum to meet the needs of all students, especially the less academically able.
- Develop and use an effective and unified system for tracking students' progress across the school.
- Provide clear strategic leadership for the school key priorities.

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. The timely introduction of new senior management and their skilful, strategic leadership has been pivotal in facilitating a coherent and universally understood improvement strategy. The executive headteacher and associate headteacher, together with a strong senior management team, are spearheading the school's rapid recovery in the aspects highlighted for improvement. Staff have responded extremely positively to the new regime and are working very hard to secure the necessary improvements.

Students report a noticeable improvement in the way the school now operates, including improved consistency in the quality of teaching and feedback they receive regarding how well they are progressing.

The school has introduced a logical tracking system which staff are using consistently. This provides a clearer picture of the progress individual students are making relative to their targets and informs any necessary additional intervention that might be required. Appropriate training has underpinned the successful implementation of the new tracking system and has provided staff with knowledge and confidence to use the system effectively. The system involves a series of initial assessments, informed by students' prior attainment to set realistic and challenging targets. The school then tracks students' progress, periodically reviewing it, to establish the extent to which students are on track to meet their targets. The system features an early warning, which alerts staff to any students who drift off-target or who have regressed. By regularly monitoring and evaluating students' progress the school is using the progress data available to provide suitable and timely intervention where required. The school shares target and assessment information with students and parents on a termly basis. Importantly, the students themselves are actively engaged in the process and must discuss and evaluate their performance during review sessions with tutors. Following these reviews they are required to develop an action plan for further improvement. Consequently, there is an increasing awareness amongst many students of how well they are doing and what they need to do to progress further. This involvement in their own assessment is having a positive impact on students' learning.

Current data and the schools' monitoring records indicate most students are on track to meet their targets this year. Evidence from lesson observations and examination of students' books indicate students are making broadly satisfactory progress overall. The school has recently introduced a number of strategies, including greater use of data and more rigorous target setting, which are beginning to have a positive impact on students' achievement. For example, students in Year 9 exceeded the school's Key Stage 3 targets for English and mathematics in their mock exam, while in science students came close to their target. These results are very encouraging and the school is confident that students will at least match their targets when they receive the results of end of key stage tests. Since students took their mock exams in November they have had a significant amount of additional time to prepare further and take advantage of the various intervention strategies provided by the school. At Key Stage 4, results from teacher assessments indicate that students are very close to the school target for the proportion of students that will gain five A* to C grades in their GCSE examinations.

Contributory factors to this improved achievement profile has been the introduction and consistent use of a suitable tracking mechanism allied with some high quality intervention work, particularly for the less academically able students who are also set to meet their targets. In addition, training and supportive monitoring have strengthened the quality of teaching. The school has also set about actively promoting positive student attitudes and behaviour as a means of raising student

achievement. This all represents a significant improvement on the situation at the time of the last inspection.

There have been a number of significant improvements to the Key Stage 4 curriculum which have enhanced its breadth and balance. Students now have access to four alternative pathways, ranging from traditional academic courses to vocational courses and including a work related learning option, alongside a raft of entry level qualifications. Students benefit from a rigorous options process, which incorporates effective support and guidance. This helps to ensure that students make an informed choice when selecting their options. The introduction of additional literacy and basic skills accreditation is helping less able students to access the curriculum more successfully, while students that are more able benefit from the services of a gifted and talented coordinator. This new curriculum is appropriate to the needs of more students at the school and allows students to benefit from a more bespoke learning experience.

The school has established a number of effective collaborations with partner schools, colleges and work providers and this is helping to enhance the quality of provision further. In addition, there is a wide range of after school provision including additional academic courses, extensive sport and music and drama opportunities. The school is also providing a number of booster classes to aid students' revision and preparation for their exams. The school is fortunate enough to benefit from the use of two local City Learning Centres. The school is set to implement refinements to improve the curriculum further in response to feedback from a recent curriculum review.

The impact of the executive headteacher and associate headteacher cannot be understated. They have set in motion a series of critical strategic plans which are revolutionising the way in which the school operates. The management of change has been cultural as well as systemic. The move towards a more transparent organisation has encouraged a greater openness and has engendered commitment from staff. They are more accountable for the effectiveness of their work and fully understand the part they have to play in bringing about improvement. Leadership and management at all levels have re-focused so that there is an increased emphasis upon students' learning and achievement. Senior management have introduced very effective monitoring and evaluation systems which allow them to gauge just how much impact recently introduced strategies are having. In a relatively short time there have been significant improvements and the foundations are being set to sustain and build on these. The more streamlined senior leadership group work very effectively together and have complementary skills. Middle leadership is strengthening and this is a reflection of the excellent example provided by senior staff. All roles and responsibilities have been reviewed with the focus more explicit on securing school improvement.

It is clear that senior leaders are strategically tackling the root causes of the identified issues from the last inspection. The school's specialist status is also proving important in driving the improvement agenda, particularly in relation to developing

personalised learning. The experience, enthusiasm and commitment of these leaders are a significant factor in the improvements secured to date. Governors have been trained to become more challenging of the school. The local authority, has now resolved previous leadership difficulties and is providing relevant support to the school, which is helping it to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "Y".

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector