

12 October 2007

Mr James Ryan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Ryan

### Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 October 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please thank the staff and students for the time they gave to me in discussions and in lessons and also thank the chair and vice chair of the governing body for their attendance at the final meeting.

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 on 14 and 15 March 2007 the school was asked to:

- improve literacy skills to help accelerate the pace of students' progress and raise achievement
- use assessment information more precisely to plan lessons that match the needs of different groups of learners
- ensure that all students with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities have clear, relevant and achievable targets for learning and/or behaviour
- improve the quality of evaluation by senior and middle leaders in order to build on strengths and prioritise areas for improvement more effectively.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

Provisional results in 2007 at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 were above those of 2006 and the school was able to provide additional evidence to show that standards, particularly in literacy, are beginning to improve. The previous report acknowledged that it was too soon to see the effect of the strategies introduced to target

underperformance. These are now meeting with some success, especially with lower-attaining students. The previous inspection reported that weak literacy skills were not tackled consistently across the curriculum. A consultant from the local authority is working one day a week as an assistant headteacher and is leading staff in training and coaching to give this a high priority. A literacy focus on all lesson plans gives clear direction for students and '15 seconds' thinking time' is a common feature in lessons. However, good practice is not yet consistent and embedded across the school.

The students' end of key stage target grade is stated in lesson plans, and although teachers acknowledge the prior attainment of students in their planning, not enough thought is given to meeting the learning needs of different groups in each class. The teaching and learning forum includes student representatives but their work is at an early stage and has yet to have a significant impact. Teachers do not routinely ensure that students know how to improve their progress by providing them with targets and with informative comments in marking. Good practice in one department shows how students themselves are responsible for transferring targets, given after work is marked, to the front of their books for easy reference when completing future assignments. The department does not, however, make the best of this and monitor the planning to ensure that teachers use the targets to plan the next stage of learning.

Following the appointment of a special educational needs coordinator all students who have a statement of special educational needs now have an individual education plan which focuses more clearly on their needs. Although these plans are now in place and teachers have copies for the students they teach, the mechanism for checking their implementation and effectiveness is not clearly defined.

The tools are in place for all middle leaders to check the work of their departments. The local authority is supporting this through its 'Toolkit' and regular training to help heads of faculties to monitor teaching and learning and come to an overall evaluation of the effectiveness of their department. So far, lesson observations have been carried out and heads of faculty are beginning to gain a picture of strengths and weaknesses. However, although the school is rich in data the evaluation and action based on findings is still a weakness.

The local authority is providing support to the school by regular meetings with all subject leaders and through the presence in school once a week of the literacy consultant. The local authority personnel involved know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Their training and advice is helping the school to come to terms with the need to focus on what needs to be done to raise standards and to be more evaluative in judging the effectiveness of its actions.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Charlesworth  
Additional Inspector