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Mr Alex Thomas
The Headteacher
St Augustine's CofE High School
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Dear Mr Thomas

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 November 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the students who spoke to me.

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 November 2006, the school was asked to:

- Ensure that students' progress in the sixth form is monitored rigorously and that the data is used to raise students' standards and achievement.
- Help students to develop skills to learn independently.
- Ensure that students, particularly the more able, make good progress in Years 7-11 in all subjects.

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 in relation to the sixth form and satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement in the main school.

A comprehensive plan exists to bring about improvements in the sixth form, which is regularly monitored and evaluated by senior leaders. Good progress has been made in establishing systems to monitor and track students' learning, which are overseen by the director of learning and the deputy head. This is raising the expectations of students, improving teaching strategies and is ensuring that underperformance is targeted early. Working closely with the new deputy head, the director of learning in the sixth form now has a more strategic role, which includes an overview of standards and achievement and teaching and learning.

The deputy head has raised the profile of the sixth form; subject leaders are now more consistent in checking the progress students are making in the sixth form and in providing support to students. The curriculum has also been reviewed so it matches the needs of students better. Students' results in the BTEC diploma support this. Assessment information is being shared regularly with parents. A more rigorous focus on attendance and punctuality has brought about improvements, although a small number of students are still late to their lessons.

Very good relationships between staff and students are evident. Sixth form students are very positive about the changes that have taken place, including more regular review of their progress and support in areas where they need help. They are enthusiastic about the Student Committee which is giving them a greater voice in the life of the school, including on developing teaching and learning. The progress of students who speak English as an additional language is also tracked, which is essential in ensuring they reach their potential. Some skilful questioning to develop students' literacy skills was observed during the inspection, which helped students to make good progress in lessons.

Senior leaders are very aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form and are addressing the areas in need of improvement. As a result, students are now making better progress in their A Level subjects, however inconsistencies between subjects remain. Students' progress is very good in mathematics but standards in biology at Level 2 are not high enough.

Students in the sixth form are having more opportunities to work collaboratively and develop independence in their learning. Good examples of this were observed during the inspection where students learnt from each other and demonstrated good independent learning skills. This involved careful planning and accurate assessment by teachers to direct students' learning further. However, this practice is not consistent, particularly in the lower school. In some lessons, students' learning is overly directed by teachers, which inhibits their independence and progress. Teachers' questioning of individuals is good but this is not always developed to ensure that students give extended answers and build upon each others response. Questioning does not always challenge students' thinking skills or enable them to be independent. Students are very positive about learning where they are active and engaged in the lessons. They would welcome more opportunities to work collaboratively and actively and for teachers to use a greater variety of teaching styles. The curriculum has recently been developed to give students in Year 7 greater opportunity to develop independence in their learning.

Year 11 students are very positive about the new tracking system, which is publicly displayed. This identifies for all if they are meeting their target grades or not and enables them to discuss with their teachers what they need to do to improve.

Although, standards at Key Stage 3 in 2007 fell in English and science, they have been improving consistently and rapidly at Key Stage 4 and are now broadly in line with national average. In mathematics, standards are above the national average and represent outstanding progress. The proportion of students gaining 5 or more GCSE passes is below the national average; however the proportion who get these passes including English and mathematics is average. This represents the focus

senior leaders place on this crucial benchmark and prepares students well for their future economic well being. The progress students make from Year 7 to 11 is satisfactory overall and improving.

In 2007, the proportion of students getting the A/A* grades was the highest ever achieved by the school. This was particularly notable in design and technology, English and mathematics. However, inconsistencies between subjects remain. In some subjects, such as French and science, able students do not reach the standards that they do in other subjects.

The school has addressed areas of concern such as standards in information and communication technology and business studies, school data shows students are on track to achieve higher standards in these subjects. Although the standards boys attain is improving, there remains a marked difference between their standards and that of girls; boys make less progress overall then can be expected of them. Senior leaders know more needs to be done to ensure students attain the standards they are capable of in all subjects and are rightly prioritising the areas where achievement is not as good.

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

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector