

Nord Anglia Inspections
Anglia House
Carrs Road
Cheadle
Stockport SK8 2LA

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0161 491 4191
Direct F 0161 4914409



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Mr Ian Mowbray
Shotton Hall School
Waveney Road
Peterlee
County Durham
SR8 1NX

Dear Mr Mowbray

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Mrs. Straw and I inspected your school on 10 March 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the visit.

Since the inspection in October 2006 about one fifth of the school's workforce has changed, including the appointment of 12 new teachers. Two new heads of department have joined the school in English and Drama and an internal appointment has been made for a head of Mathematics. The school has achieved recognition by the Department for Children, Schools and Families for improvements in students' progress between Key Stages 2 and 3. In addition, the school is scheduled to be rebuilt under the 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) programme with completion planned for September 2010. The student roll is forecast to increase in September 2008 within the context of falling student numbers in the area.

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 17–18 October 2006, the school was asked to:

- Ensure that systems and procedures for monitoring and improving performance are implemented consistently and effectively throughout the school.
- Raise standards in English and mathematics and improve students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Ensure that all teaching has the pace and challenge to sustain recent improvements.

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

The school's senior leadership has taken important steps to improve the school's effectiveness in tackling weaknesses identified in the inspection report. Rigorous and consistent procedures are now in place to monitor performance. Senior staff have a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses; areas requiring further improvement are targeted appropriately and with determination. Middle leaders are held directly accountable for the performance of their departments and this has strengthened the school's collective focus on raising standards as its core business. While variations in departmental performance remain, the trend is strongly one of improvement.

In 2007 standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 improved more quickly in English and mathematics than seen nationally and are the highest so far attained by students at the school. While standards in these subjects remain below average overall, the gap is closing. Students' progress in English was significantly better than in other schools whereas their progress in mathematics was broadly average in comparison. At both key stages, however, too few students are attaining higher level passes. A significant development in this improvement is the better use of assessment data. The school now tracks the performance of students accurately and in exacting detail. This information is made accessible to heads of department and teaching staff. It is enabling them to respond effectively where underachievement is identified to secure improvement.

The school has adopted an effective and consistent approach to improving teaching and learning. There is knowledge and agreement about the characteristics of good and better teaching and this has resulted in lessons which are well-planned to take account of pupils' individual learning needs. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. Lessons move at a brisk pace and many activities are timed. Teachers set high expectations and the majority of students respond with confidence. Relationships are good so that all groups of pupils feel relaxed in class and ready to be fully engaged. Teachers employ a variety of strategies and aim to make learning enjoyable; as a result, behaviour in lessons is consistently good. The development of teaching and learning is well led. An effective programme to develop the skills of teachers is having a positive impact on improving the frequency of good teaching. Morale amongst staff is high. Teachers identify the improved use of data to measure progress and better teamwork as key factors in raising achievement and accelerating progress.

Students say they enjoy lessons. They know they are making better progress because their work is marked carefully and helpful advice is given on how to improve. They know their targets and how to reach or exceed them. Students respond well to managing their own workloads and being independent. They say they are rarely, if ever, bored.

The school has created a culture of constantly seeking to improve teaching and raise standards. There is a shared enthusiasm among all staff to make their work more effective.

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

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson
Her Majesty's Inspector