

21 May 2008

Mr M Rushby
Headteacher
Whitgift School
Crosland Road
Grimsby
DN37 9EH

Dear Mr Rushby

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help that you and your staff gave when Amraz Ali HMI and I inspected your school on 20 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information that you provided before and during our visit. Would you pass on our thanks to the chair of governors and extend particular thanks to the students we met at lunchtime and the staff we met after 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 October 2007, the school was asked to:

- Raise the achievement of all students, prioritising those in Year 11 and Year 9.
- Improve teaching ensuring that expectations are always high and that students of differing ability are suitably catered for
- Sharpen quality assurance systems, such as those for monitoring and improving teachers' work and students' progress
- Improve attendance.

Having considered all the evidence we are of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the key issues. Since the previous inspection the school, with the support of the local authority (LA), has worked strategically to implement a series of well conceived improvement plans. These measures are already showing an impact on outcomes. The school has not adopted a 'quick fix' mentality and continues to work holistically to eradicate the root causes of the inconsistencies, anomalies and underachievement that underpinned the original categorisation of the school. The headteacher, together with his senior leaders, has cultivated a change in ethos and culture which is bearing fruit.

The school has been relentless in its commitment to raising standards. However, up to this point this has not translated into higher attainment and appropriate

achievement in national tests and examinations for students. Indeed for several years, students' progress has been inadequate. Encouragingly, the latest available data supplied by the school, including monitoring records, mock examination and test results, and externally validated coursework, shows that the majority of students in Year 9 and Year 11 are on track to reach their targets. The school is expected to meet its challenging target for the percentage of students gaining at least five good GCSE passes and its baseline target for the proportion reaching this threshold with English and mathematics. At Year 9 the data indicate that the school is likely to meet its minimum targets in English, mathematics and science. If realised this will clearly represent significant improvement in students' outcomes. In other year groups the data indicate a more mixed picture, albeit improved on previous years and there remains variation in rates of progress in core subjects. The impact of the new curriculum cannot be underestimated and the new BTEC (the Business and Technology Education Council) science course has already delivered a double award at grades A* to C for 60% of the cohort. Similar success is predicted for students taking the new diplomas in engineering and sport. Quality systems now exist that facilitate teachers' use of data to promote better learning and trigger intervention where students are underachieving.

This school is a caring organisation and this is epitomised in the corporate way staff monitor attendance rates and extol the benefits of good attendance to students. Improving attendance is high profile: the school is working successfully with a number of external agencies and parents to break the cycle of poor attendance by a small group of 'hard to reach' students. A coordinated approach including effective early warning systems, preventative and restorative strategies is bearing fruit and attendance rates continue to climb. Since the last inspection attendance has risen from 88.5% to 90.7%, which is within a whisker of the school's 2008 target set by the government. A rewards programme, attendance surgeries, home visits, truancy sweeps and a good citizenship programme are all proving successful mechanisms. There are some in-year variations, with slippage at Year 10, which the school is working hard to redress. A coherent and consistently applied system for managing behaviour has contributed to an improved climate for learning. Exclusions have fallen, as have referrals for poor behaviour. The school's internal exclusion unit has a good re-integration rate and older students say, 'behaviour is much better.'

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Recent monitoring by senior managers, the local authority and external consultants judged 70% of lessons to be good or better. Inspection evidence confirms this picture. This good teaching is leading to improved learning and students are benefiting from a greater consistency of quality. Most staff have high expectations of students and there is a clear focus on supporting them to reach or exceed their targets. Students know how well they are doing relative to their targets. As a result of the confidence staff have in them and their own ambitions for the future, students are developing higher aspirations and attitudes to learning are good. On the whole staff are setting and marking homework. Importantly many staff provide helpful guidance on how students can further improve the quality of their work and also indicate the standard of work relative to national curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Inspectors saw evidence of

planning and practice that catered for students of differing ability. Staff have benefited from a range of improvement strategies including training on teaching and learning, coaching from consultants and local authority advisors, and joint working with staff at partner schools. Despite the improvements seen, there remains a degree of inconsistency across and within some subjects. The school has introduced a rewards system for good effort and achievement which has been well received by students.

The senior leadership team is tackling the areas of weakness identified by the last inspection with vigour. They have introduced a series of strategies that allow them insight into every aspect of the school's work, so that they can evaluate the quality of provision and its impact on students' learning effectively. Staff are held to account and regular support and challenge meetings take place, alongside rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. There has been increased focus on the use of assessment to promote better learning and the effectiveness of processes to support good attendance, which is paying dividends. A thorough analysis of students' behaviour and the suitability of the existing curriculum informed the introduction of new structures. These robust systems are becoming embedded and making a major contribution to improving outcomes for students. There are sound plans to refine these systems further. Staff have a good understanding of the new procedures because they have been fully consulted and received appropriate training and support. They appreciate the greater transparency in the educational direction of the school. Undoubtedly, improved initial assessment, regular tracking and targeted intervention of students, along with an enhanced learning climate, thoughtful personalisation of the curriculum and more focused teaching have fuelled the gains made so far.

Aspects of the LA's revised action plan retain the lack of specificity highlighted by the Local Managing Inspector's evaluation. Nonetheless, in practice the LA is providing good support to the school which has been integral to the improving profile that now exists. A number of national strategy advisors, educational consultants and local authority officers are working closely with the school to accelerate the rate of progress to good effect. Regular scrutiny visits, coaching and paired observations by the LA is building management capacity and providing the school with valued external validation of the impact of their actions. The school has developed useful partnerships with some local schools and colleges to further enhance the quality of education it provides to students. Governors are very ambitious for the school and discharge their duties judiciously. They have a firm grasp of how effectively the school is performing and are providing the necessary challenge as well as support to the school.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Young".

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector