

Prospects Learning Services Ltd
132-138 High Street
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1EZ

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

Direct T 020 8313 7760
Direct F 020 8464 3393



11 February 2008

Mr Phillip Mitchell
Acting Headteacher
Cressex Community School
Holmer's Lane
High Wycombe
HP12 4QA

Dear Mr Mitchell

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues gave when I inspected your school on 5 February 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would also like you to thank the students to whom I spoke, who were unfailingly courteous, forthright and helpful.

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 January 2007, the school was asked to:

- ensure that all levels of management are effective
- raise attainment at all levels
- reduce dependency on supply teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form.

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 pupils' achievement.

In the months following the inspection, the school experienced further significant turbulence in senior leadership, including a serious shortfall of key personnel. During this period some very effective middle leaders and managers enabled students to continue to make satisfactory progress in their learning and achieve in most subjects. Following strong support and action by the governing body and intervention by the local authority (LA), senior leadership in recent months has stabilised. The current partnership of an experienced acting headteacher and a knowledgeable new deputy headteacher has enabled the school to plan effectively for improvement in many areas for 2008-09. Three key subject leadership appointments, together with two

assistant headships, have been made. Most importantly, the school has recently appointed a headteacher with extensive relevant experience to take up post in April 2008.

Over the last year the school has been involved in planning for major rebuilding work, due to start this term and to be completed in 2009. This project, whilst warmly welcomed by the school community, has inevitably required much effort and input from school leaders and governors. The LA has assigned the services of a consultant head to the school in order to support senior leaders and is committed to continuing this support during the remainder of the school year, to ensure effective transition for the new headteacher.

Students' GCSE results in 2007 were broadly comparable to previous years: for example, 37% of students achieved 5+ A*-C, with 29% including English and maths. Contextual value-added measures place the school in the top 28% of schools nationally for overall achievement, and in the top 3% for maths and English. This represents impressive achievement for students over the five years, given their starting points. Results at Key Stage 3 rose in maths and science, although there was a drop in English.

The January 2007 inspection report praised the work on assessment data undertaken by the school, and this work has now been taken forward with the current Y11. Students' progress has been tracked throughout the year. One-to-one interviews with the Year 11 Director of Learning are having a significant impact on students' understanding of what they need to do to attain higher grades and, importantly, on their motivation. Targets set are challenging, but current evidence indicates that students have the potential to make substantial gains in summer 2008 examinations.

Although the school is still reliant upon supply teachers, efforts have been made this year to retain the on-going services of known and effective supply staff. They are familiar with the school and students, and undertake work which is set by specialist colleagues. In order to strengthen the quality of teaching further, learning support assistants have been assigned to subject departments. They support students on a regular basis and provide links to learners for supply teachers. Appointments have recently been made to subject leader posts in English, science and design and technology and the school anticipates full permanent staffing from April 2008.

Improvements in attendance and behaviour have also impacted positively on the quality of learning. The school has put into place a number of successful measures to improve attendance. Recent prioritising of Year 11 has, for example, led to competitions between tutor groups, resulting in one case of 100% attendance over a week. Students speak about recent improvements to behaviour, identifying the impact of 'the law' – an on-site police officer- stricter teachers and swift follow-up to any incidents of misbehaviour. They feel that the school is now a quieter, calmer place and that this helps their learning.

In the sixth form, numbers remain low (75 currently), and results in 2007 showed little improvement, with low entry numbers and clear areas of under-achievement. Whilst staffing shortages and leadership issues hindered development in the sixth form in the two terms following the inspection, more progress has been made in

recent months. The secondment, and subsequent appointment as deputy headteacher, of a 14-19 specialist, has enabled the school to review its curriculum and, particularly, improve provision in the sixth form. A new sixth form curriculum, with clear pathways and identification of post-16 provision over local schools, is due to be presented shortly to prospective sixth formers. These plans are at an early stage, and it will be impossible to evaluate their impact until 2008-09, but the school has taken positive action to improve provision in the future. Importantly, clear guidance to current Year 11 students should enable them to choose appropriate courses more confidently than in the past. Most aspects of current provision, leadership and progress remain – as at the time of the last inspection – inadequate, but there is now clear capacity for future improvement.

Overall a number of initiatives have been undertaken since the last inspection and some of them are beginning to show an early impact on students' learning and achievement. The school's many committed and effective teachers have high expectations of their students. They recognise that work currently underway on tracking progress and intervening early needs to be extended to all subjects and year groups. On-going monitoring of progress in these areas will remain a priority, in order to secure further improvement as students and staff prepare to move to their new school next year.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Feltham
Her Majesty's Inspector