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Mr G Elliker
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Elliker

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 March 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to your colleagues on the senior leadership team for the materials that they prepared for 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 on 28 February and 1 March 2007, the school was asked to:

- build on the good practice to establish coherent systems for assessing and tracking students' progress and use this information to develop better systems for self-review
- develop management policies to establish more consistent classroom practice
- improve the relationship with the local authority and find more ways of developing partnerships with local mainstream schools
- establish secure risk assessment practices for students going on trips out of school.

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 and in raising the students' achievements.

The inspection report celebrated leaders' success in establishing an orderly community and in gaining the confidence of staff in this large brand new school. An increasingly effective leadership team has built on those foundations systematically and their actions are successfully accelerating school improvement. As a result, there are now better outcomes for students in terms of their academic achievement and personal development.

As senior leaders have settled into their roles they have become increasingly influential in establishing effective and efficient management systems. The findings from an audit on the quality of teaching and learning, for example, were used to develop focused training on the features of the most effective lessons. This comprehensive review also considered inconsistencies in the management of students' behaviour and the impact that this might have on the pace of learning. Once again, leaders' analysis of their findings resulted in training being arranged to develop a uniform approach to behaviour management. Consequently, the quality of teaching is now more consistent and students' learning benefits as a result.

As more robust management systems have been introduced, senior leaders have involved and supported other colleagues with a management responsibility, namely heads of faculty and personal learning coordinators. These middle managers join leaders to form an extended management team of twelve staff, referred to as the school improvement group. By involving middle managers more extensively, the school further ensures that monitoring procedures are applied consistently and that best practice is disseminated. Middle managers' involvement has also improved the school's effectiveness in assessing and recording students' achievements and in tracking their progress. Well considered individual learning plans have been introduced, with challenging literacy and numeracy targets. Students' progress towards these objectives is closely monitored and intervention strategies, such as placing students on a reading recovery programme, are introduced in those cases where progress is slow. This is having an impact on students' achievements. Prior to committing itself to an electronic system for managing its assessment data, the school took advice from the local authority (LA) to ensure that the software lent itself to doing exactly what the school wanted. This delayed implementation for a short while and, although it is now running efficiently, leaders at all levels are not yet in a position to interrogate data to the depth that they wish to investigate. However, it is intended that the school improvement group will develop a collective understanding and responsibility for analysing data, reviewing the relative progress of different groups of students and taking appropriate action to address areas of underperformance.

Whilst improved management systems and more refined assessment procedures have improved the quality of education and the rate of students' learning, greatly improved links with partners also contribute to students' achievements. Links with local schools enable students to benefit from courses that Oak Grove does not offer, such as a GCSE dance course, and from out of school clubs, such as rugby. In addition, students from neighbouring schools use Oak Grove facilities like the swimming pool. The school was granted specialist status for the arts earlier this year and Oak Grove students will directly benefit as the school develops its community role. The school has been equally successful in improving its relationship with the LA. Although the teething problems associated with the establishment of a new school, such as funding, are being addressed relatively slowly, delays have not prevented the school from taking a leading role in the work of the LA. The headteacher is very active in working with colleagues at both an area level and countywide, such as in ensuring that the school is represented in plans for delivering vocational diplomas.

A programme of educational visits, including residential, also contributes to enriching and extending students' learning. The school has implemented a comprehensive policy and detailed procedures, ratified by governors, for ensuring students' safety and well being when they are off site and records show that staff follow these requirements routinely.

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

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell
Additional Inspector