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Dr Edward Yeates
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Yeates

Ofsted monitoring of Notice to Improve schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on the 10 July 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please convey my thanks to your chair of governors and the local authority representative for finding time to talk to me about the progress of the school since the previous inspection. Would you also thank those students who met with me over lunch and spoke about life at 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 November 2007, the school was asked to:

- improve standards and achievement in mathematics at Key Stage 4
- increase the proportion of good teaching in order to raise achievement across the school
- improve the use of data, and the tracking and assessment of students' progress to help ensure all are motivated, challenged and supported to achieve the best they can
- develop more effective mechanisms to ensure the views of students are fully taken into account.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the areas for improvement and in raising pupils' standards at both key stages.

Since the start of the academic year, four new members of staff have joined the senior management team; one shortly after the school was inspected in November 2007. Management accountability is clear, especially in relation to the action planning that the school has used to address the issues raised in the last inspection report. The monitoring of progress against the improvement areas by senior leaders and managers, including the governors, is good overall, and complements well the targeted and effective work of the local authority and school improvement partner. The leadership team is now better placed to drive further improvements to the school.

Since the last inspection, a concerted effort has been made by the school and its external partners to address underperformance in mathematics at Key Stage 4. Since January, the gap between the students' attainment and the 2008 target for GCSE A*-C grades in mathematics has closed by 23%. This improvement reflects well the successful strategies used by the school to raise levels of attainment; these have also contributed to the all-round levels of improvement seen in most subjects since the previous inspection. In Year 10, the increase in attainment is less dramatic but nevertheless is improving satisfactorily against the school's targets.

Standards and achievement across the school are improving because the proportion of good teaching across the school is increasing. There is, however, still some inadequate teaching that the school has identified and is working to improve with targeted support from within school, and in partnership with local authority specialists. The lesson observation strategy being used by the senior management team is working effectively to identify strengths and areas of development in teaching. Since February, when the school began the first of its lesson observation cycles, senior managers have evidenced an improvement in the overall quality of teaching seen, with around 95% satisfactory or better, with over half good or outstanding. These data have been confirmed by external partners, who recognised that while improvements have been made, there are still areas for further development, especially in mathematics, where there is comparatively less satisfactory or better teaching.

The school holds some important data sets that are being used sensibly and accurately to assess the overall progress being made against the challenging learning targets at both key stages. Staff, especially those who hold senior or middle management responsibilities, are making good use of externally produced and internally derived data to inform teaching and aid students' overall progress. However, while some subject areas have developed robust approaches to using these data, there are still some which are at a much earlier stage of development and usage. Overall, however, there is a sense of

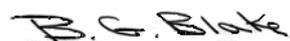
common purpose and direction that emerges from the actions that the school has taken in this area since the previous inspection. The collation and analyses of these performance data are helping senior managers, governors and the local authority to know, more accurately, how well the school is progressing towards its end of key stage targets.

There are clear and well known procedures that enable the school to gather the students' views about a varying range of school-related matters. A number of students also indicated that since the previous inspection many more teachers in lessons are more actively involving them in their learning. All those students who spoke with the inspector felt that the school took their views seriously. Overall, the students praise this aspect of the school's work, but they also recognise that some aspects of seeking the students' voice need to be developed further. For example, the school council is still at a relatively early stage of development and influence.

The local authority's 'statement of action' identifies a range of suitable priorities and actions for supporting the school in addressing the key areas for improvement. Ofsted's evaluation of this plan was that it contained too many success criteria that were descriptive and lacking in quantifiable measures. However, there are now sufficient performance data available across all the improvement areas for these to be used as a more specific means of aiding senior managers, governors and the local authority to more accurately assess the rate of progress of the school over the life of the plan.

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

Yours sincerely



Brian G Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector