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Mr D Hill  
The Headteacher  
The Burton Borough School  
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Dear Mr Hill

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 1 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, students and governors who gave up time during the day to talk to 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 25 and 26 April 2007, the school was asked to:

- improve the monitoring of all aspects of the life of the school and ensure prompt action is taken to reduce inconsistencies
- eliminate inadequate teaching and ensure good practice becomes much more widespread
- improve communication with parents to ensure the vast majority support important policies relating to increasing achievement and the management of behaviour
- increase opportunities for students to take responsibility for all aspects of their development in lessons and in the life of the school generally.

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' achievement.

Over the last year, the school has improved its procedures for monitoring all aspects of the life of the school. Collaboration with consultants from the local authority has helped senior staff and middle managers to develop their understanding of how to

monitor provision within their areas of responsibility. Through the links which have been instigated with individual departments, governors, too, have developed a better understanding of the school and are now keeping a careful check on the progress made with the school's action plan. Reviews of individual departments undertaken during the autumn term and a subsequent programme of 'drop-in' lesson observations have enabled senior leaders to gain a good understanding of the quality of teaching throughout the school. Analysis and evaluation of the outcomes of these observations have given rise to training sessions, which have helped to improve the quality of teaching. The reintroduction of year leaders has ensured much closer oversight of students' behaviour and academic progress. The new assessment and reporting cycle has given staff, students and their parents a much more accurate picture of students' attainment and progress. As a result, staff identify much more quickly than before where additional intervention is required to enable individual students, and the school as a whole, to meet their academic targets. The rigorous monitoring of the academic performance of students in Year 11 has been a major factor in improving academic standards this year. The school has acknowledged the need to continue with a rigorous monitoring schedule in order to embed the positive changes to ethos and practice which have occurred over the last year.

Steps have been taken to improve the overall coordination of teaching and learning and subject leadership in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, although some changes have yet to be implemented. A much improved range of professional development opportunities, input from the local authority's consultants in the core subjects, and the increasing impact of the school's specialist arts status have improved the quality of teaching and learning and led to more innovative teaching practice. The willingness to try new ideas has led, for example, to much more productive revision sessions in English in Year 11 in which students are actively involved and engaged in their learning, rather than teacher-led sessions which fail to engage the students' interest. Although there is still some weaker teaching, staff morale and the overall quality of both teaching and learning have improved. As a result, there is a much higher proportion of students who are on track to achieve five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C compared with the 2007 GCSE results.

Significant emphasis has been placed on developing more active participation of students in lessons. During the visit, for example, a number of classes were observed in which students were absorbed in, and clearly enjoying, collaborative work and making good progress as a result. The school acknowledges the need to continue to develop teaching styles so that all staff engage students actively through lively and interesting teaching. A revision of the school's behaviour management strategies has placed greater emphasis on rewarding students for doing well. This has encouraged students to take much greater responsibility for both their behaviour and their own academic progress. The reinvigoration of the school council and the involvement of students as mentors and privilege students have provided different ways for students to make a positive contribution to the running of the school. For example, a group of students in Year 7 has been planning the production of a DVD for next year's intake of new students to help them to settle into the school and feel safe. Other year groups have contributed to discussions and new initiatives related to the national 'Every Child Matters' agenda. There is still scope for students to undertake even

greater responsibility within the school council. The school as a whole has embraced a major project to raise funds for a medical project in Ecuador.

The school has improved communications with parents. Regular newsletters keep parents well informed about what is happening within school. The increased use of email and text messaging alerts parents quickly if there are concerns. Staff seek out opportunities to praise students when they achieve well or make particular effort and to reinforce these positive messages through postcards or telephone calls to students' parents. This positive communication is much appreciated by parents. Improved arrangements for parental consultations, such as the evening arranged to communicate mock GCSE results, and much more frequent reporting on students' progress give parents a clear understanding of the progress their children are making. As a result of these initiatives, the level of parental concern and the number of complaints have declined significantly.

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

Yours sincerely

Graham Sims  
Additional Inspector