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25 June 2008  
Mr David Taylor  
Witchford Village College  
Manor Road  
Witchford  
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Dear Mr Taylor

### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help, which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 24 June 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information, which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the Chair of Governors and the students. I appreciated the discussions we had about what the school needs to do next in order to bring about further improvement.

Achievement continues to be satisfactory and standards overall are broadly in line with national averages. In 2007 the average points score of students in their GCSE examinations was also broadly in line with national averages. However, within this there was some variation and the standards attained in mathematics and science were below average. This meant that not enough students achieved five good GCSE passes. The college has improved the identification and intervention where there is underachievement and consequently standards have improved this year. The colleges' current data suggests Year 9 and Year 11 are on course to make satisfactory or better progress.

As a result of the inspection on 13 and 14 June 2007 the school was asked to:

- improve the overall quality and consistency of teaching to eliminate the variations in the rates of progress that students make in different subjects and classes
- make more effective use of assessment information, including marking, to guide and monitor students' improvement in lessons and over time
- tighten the college's systems to ensure that leadership at all levels is held accountable for driving improvement and that day-to-day management is rigorous
- improve the quality and effectiveness of communication and ensure that the views of parents and students are properly canvassed.

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 the students' achievement.

Action has been taken to strengthen aspects of teaching such as matching activities to clear learning objectives and this has improved the quality of lessons. Students now receive a majority of lessons that are now satisfactory and over a quarter of lessons are good. The college is aware there is still some variation, particularly in mathematics and science. The best lessons engage students in interesting activities and they are clear about the next steps they should take to improve their work. In less successful lessons, teachers dominate discussions and so students do not always have the opportunity to offer extended answers. The college has been successful in addressing the high turnover of teachers and some important permanent appointments have been made. The impact of this stable staffing is showing early signs of accelerating student progress. The college has shortened the length of lessons and this has resulted in teachers being more focussed on improving students' rates of progress.

The college has put in place some sound systems to track students' attainment and progress. This is securely in place in Key Stage 4 and senior leaders have useful plans to ensure this good practice is embedded throughout the college. Teachers make regular assessments of students' progress and they record the outcomes of these assessments systematically. Senior leaders analyse the results and use the information to identify under-achieving students and plan suitable intervention to help them catch up. This has resulted in students' achievement improving. The college is working hard to support teachers and middle leaders in using the data and many are developing sound skills in analysing progress in the areas for which they are accountable. The college has taken some useful steps to strengthen the quality of guidance to students about the next steps they can take to improve their work, however, this is not yet consistent.

A sound start has been made in tightening the college systems to improve leadership at all levels. Senior and middle leaders observe lessons and provide teachers with written and oral feedback about how to improve their work. The written feedback to teachers does not always identify key areas for improvement or indicate when lessons will be checked again to make sure that weaknesses have been eliminated. The senior and middle leaders know this are keen to improve their work in this area. Middle leaders meet regularly with senior staff to discuss progress in the area for which they are accountable which enables senior staff to offer timely support and challenge as appropriate. The new teaching and learning group has begun some interesting work in helping all staff support each other in improving the quality of lessons. The introduction of systematic processes and procedures has resulted in a well-ordered environment and this, in turn, has resulted in improvements in the smooth running of the colleges' day-to-day management. For example, attendance has improved so that it is in line with national averages and the behaviour around the college is usually calm and disciplined.

Students and their parents are appreciative of the efforts the college has made to improve the quality and effectiveness of communication. Students feel that their

views are valued and that that their parents are well informed about their progress. Year 11 students were particularly grateful for the time and care teachers had given to them this year. Students told me about the sound work the college is doing to ensure that the college council is democratic and has an accurate picture of their views. There is now a variety of student forums. Students can easily find a way of sharing their views, secure in the knowledge that staff will listen. An example of how this is improving aspects of college life can be seen in the improved attendance of Year 11 students following the response to their suggestions about changes to their tutor groups. Parents too are now more involved in the life of the college through focus groups, which give them the opportunity to discuss different aspects of their children's education.

The specialist sports college status has begun to extend its impact across the college by sharing good practice through the work of the teaching and learning group. Results in 2007 showed that standards in this area were above national averages at Key Stage 4 and the college's recent assessment data shows encouraging signs of further improvement. Students continue to enjoy a good range of extra curricular activities and these contribute to their positive attitudes.

Governors are providing an appropriate level of support and challenge. They are kept informed and they are continuing to develop ways in which they can help the college maintain its focus on improving students' progress. The local authority has also been a sound source of support and advice.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt  
Additional Inspector