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Mrs Jennifer Elliott
Headteacher
Wellfield Community School Specialist Maths and Computing College
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Wingate
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TS28 5AX

Dear Mrs Elliott

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 July 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please thank the staff who spoke to me, and thank particularly the students who were so helpful during the day.

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 June 2007, the school was asked to:

- Improve the climate for learning by eradicating the unsatisfactory behaviour of a significant minority of students, particularly boys.
- Improve the proportion of students gaining 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics.
- Continue to make strenuous efforts to minimise disruption to learning through staff absence.

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.

When students join the school their attainment overall is broadly in line with national averages. However, more than a fifth of students have reading ages which are at least two years below their actual age and many students have particular difficulties with writing and with some aspects of mathematics. Some students are reluctant to answer questions, participate in discussions or listen carefully to their peers. This has a considerable impact on their progress. The school has well established systems to

help students overcome difficulties in reading and to a lesser extent in writing but systems to improve the basic skills in mathematics and to improve speaking and listening are less well developed.

In 2007 students made inadequate progress in all core subjects at Key Stage 3 given their starting points at the end of Key Stage 2. The proportion of students attaining the nationally expected Level 5 was well below national averages and far fewer students attained higher levels than did so nationally. Just over a third of students made the expected two levels progress during the key stage and almost a fifth made little or no progress.

The picture was more positive at Key Stage 4. In 2007 students made satisfactory progress overall. Progress in English was inadequate but progress in mathematics, the specialism, was satisfactory. There was a slight decline in the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C and fewer students than in previous years attained five or more passes which included English and mathematics. However, attainment in mathematics improved, the school met its specialist targets and students attained well in English literature. Most students gained five or more passes at grades A* to G and nearly all students gained at least one pass. Students with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities at school action plus and those with a statement of special educational need, at both key stages, did less well than their peers in other schools. School data indicate that this situation has improved.

The school predicts that standards in both key stages will rise in 2008. This is because systems to assess and track the progress made by individual students have improved, particularly at Key Stage 3, and more students are in school and attending lessons. Rigorous procedures to monitor attendance and to track punctuality have led to improvements in all year groups. Attendance overall has improved by 1% and the proportion of students who are persistent non-attenders has declined by 26%.

Behaviour is improving. Systems to manage and improve behaviour have been reviewed, additional support and training have been provided for staff and there is a strong staff presence on corridors. The nurture group in Year 7, the independent learning centres and improvements to the curriculum provide support for vulnerable students or those who are reintegrating into school. The school is working effectively with a small group of parents who appreciate the support they receive. There is a staged programme of intervention and support which is carefully monitored. School data show that more than 60% of students moved down at least one stage during the year. Incidents of verbal abuse, truancy and disruptive behaviour have decreased and the number of permanent exclusions has declined. The number of recorded behavioural incidents has declined significantly and only a very small proportion of students have had more than one 'seclusion' during the year. Only a quarter of students have received a detention. However, the school is aware that there is still much to do. There are tensions in some lessons and students say that although behaviour is getting better some lessons are still disrupted. Some staff manage these difficulties well ensuring that other students continue to learn but it is difficult for students in these lessons to concentrate fully on their tasks.

Some teachers do not reinforce new expectations rigorously and as a result students do not receive clear guidance about what is acceptable. This leads to inconsistencies which slow down the rate of progress. For example some teachers allow students to chew gum in lessons but others, including senior leaders, uphold school rules and ensure that it is removed into one of the many bins which are placed at convenient points around the school. Students report that discarded gum is a problem since it is left on tables, carpets and radiators and then sticks to clothes and possessions. Ensuring that all students conform to new expectations would help to eradicate this problem and give clear messages about attitudes and behaviour.

Teaching is not good enough to tackle the legacy of underachievement, promote consistently positive behaviour and ensure that students enjoy school. Students talk enthusiastically about history lessons in which they 'plan and teach' a lesson and students working in the new vocational skills centre make exceptionally good progress learning new skills and taking pride in their work. However, lessons of this quality are rare. All staff plan lessons carefully identifying the objective of the lesson and predicted outcomes. There is a focus on improving achievement and most students know their target grades or levels. However, marking is too variable and students do not receive good enough guidance about how to improve their work. Although some teachers mark work carefully giving students helpful guidance about how to improve, this is not yet the case in all lessons. Some books are marked with a tick or brief positive comment and others are marked very rarely or not at all. Opportunities to identify and tackle misunderstandings or mistakes and thus improve attainment are missed. Many students do not take pride in their work. Some books are covered in graffiti and the presentation and organisation of some work is poor.

Staffing has stabilised after some further turbulence in the spring term. The school, supported by the local authority (LA), has appointed experienced and suitably qualified staff to all but one of the vacancies which remain. The school is confident that this situation will be resolved by the start of the autumn term. The deputy head teacher will leave the school in August in order to take up a headship in another LA. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed.

The LA has supported the school very effectively. It has a very clear view of the progress the school has made and the issues which remain. The school improvement partner (SIP) has helped the school focus on the most important areas for improvement and is providing sufficient challenge to help the school improve further.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector