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16 July 2008

Ms Maggie Bailey  
The Headteacher  
Grey Court School  
Ham  
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Dear Ms Bailey

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 10 July 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

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 27 and 28 June 2007, the school was asked to address the following areas for improvement.

Raise standards and achievement by:

- ensuring that the identification of the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is accurate, that they receive the appropriate support and that their progress is monitored
- raising the quality of teaching further and ensuring that teachers plan work to meet the needs of all abilities
- ensuring that middle managers monitor and evaluate effectively their areas of responsibility.

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 students' achievement.

The headteacher and senior leaders have set out a clear direction for improving the school's performance and have established a solid foundation for further development. Staff, students and governors are clear that the past year has seen

improvement and speak of the positive impact of actions taken on the climate for learning, including behaviour, facilities, and aspects of learning and teaching. Due to a legacy of underachievement, these actions have not yet made their full impact on achievement and standards. Whilst students' progress has been speeded up this year, some underachievement is still predicted.

Standards as measured by GCSE results in 2007 were close to the national average. Achievement by the cohort as a whole, however, when measured by the contextualised value-added (CVA) measures was inadequate and lower than in 2006. The number of students achieving 5 A\*-G was lower than the national average due to some lower attaining students not sitting examinations for courses they had studied. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards were average in mathematics and science but below average in English. Achievement, however, was below that expected except in mathematics.

Current rigorous tracking shows that satisfactory progress has been made in addressing underperformance and that standards are rising. However, targets are unlikely to be reached at Key Stage 4 and achievement has not improved sufficiently, although the school's tracking suggests that results will be better than in 2007. Key Stage 3 standards are also rising in mathematics and science and, in these subjects; the school is predicting satisfactory achievement. However, evidence suggests achievement in English has not improved enough.

Appropriate systems have been put in place to identify accurately the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These have been fully embedded with students in Years 7 and 8 but there is still work to be done in reviewing older students' needs. Individual education plans (IEPs) drawn up following identification are helpful to staff for planning their lessons but the information they contain is not yet consistently used by all staff. More effective, regular communication between heads of faculty, year heads and the additional needs coordinator is starting to have an impact. Clearer line management responsibilities are being developed to ensure a more consistent approach to monitoring students' progress across the school. The faster progress of students' in mathematics is being analysed to learn lessons for other subject areas. The recent linking of IEP targets to academic monitoring targets has helped tutors monitor progress more accurately. Teaching staff appreciate the extra information they are getting on students in their classes. They have been provided with helpful guidance cards on how best to work with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but the use of these is not yet consistent in all classes. Whilst a number of initiatives have been undertaken since the last inspection, and some of them are beginning to show an early impact, the school is still predicting underperformance of a number of these students in the current Year 11.

The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching through investment in staff training in lesson observation. Good teaching and learning exist with examples of outstanding work. There has been good collaborative work with local authority advisers and other schools to support teachers' development. There is eagerness amongst staff to share good practice and improve, and the school has developed its own register of good practice to assist this. Correctly, the school has focused on

eradicating unsatisfactory teaching. Students generally recognise that teaching is better this year and speak with relief that the number of lessons that need a covering or supply teacher has gone down considerably. However, there is not yet enough good or better teaching to accelerate the learning of current students to address the legacy of slower progress from previous years. The school knows that it now needs to move more teaching from satisfactory to good and good to outstanding. A large number of new appointments have been made for September and staff turnover is quite high for a variety of reasons. The school is confident that the new teachers have the potential to improve teaching quality. Currently, students say that too few teachers consistently match the work they receive to their ability. This is because teachers do not consistently use assessment information to plan suitable range of activities for the classroom.

Middle leaders now have a better consistency of approach to improving provision in their areas. This has come out of a well designed review system that they fully understand and are implementing to monitor the work of their departments. The passion and commitment of the headteacher to drive improvement are demonstrated by her careful work with the school improvement partner and other external consultants in auditing all aspects of the school's work. This has led to carefully thought out development planning that is well reflected in departmental plans. Middle leaders have a good understanding of attainment data for their areas of responsibility when it pertains to the overall attainment of students. Use of this data in tracking progress is currently more efficient for individuals than for monitoring groups of students. The school is aware that middle leaders will have a key role in driving improvement by monitoring and evaluating the most appropriate strategies for accelerating progress in the classroom. This will need to be consistently sharp for the headteacher's appropriately ambitious plans for school improvement to be realised in the time scales she requires.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Gale".

Peter Gale  
Her Majesty's Inspector