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Mrs Kim Burke
Headteacher
St Andrew's Catholic School
Hillfield
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Dear Mrs Burke

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Lorna Brackstone, H M Inspector, on 9 December 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 and sixth form students who spoke 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 13 and 14 November 2007, the school was asked to:

- Improve provision in the sixth form by offering suitable courses and thereby enable students to make better progress and attain at an overall level closer to the national average.
- Make better use of a range of data to set appropriately challenging targets across the school.

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 in relation to the sixth form and satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement in the main school.

A comprehensive plan has been put in place to bring about improvements in the sixth form, which is regularly monitored and evaluated by senior leaders, the governors and the local authority. In addition, the school has successfully engaged with local authority advisers and other local schools as a means of strengthening the sixth form improvement. As a consequence, the profile of the sixth form throughout the school has been significantly raised, and staff and students are very positive.

The roles and responsibilities of the head of sixth form have been clarified, including a more strategic role which includes an overview of standards and achievement and teaching and learning. A-level results in 2008 indicated that students made much better progress from their starting points, although inconsistencies between subjects remain. The pass rate for A levels was 100% and the proportion of students achieving the highest grades increased. However, due to some students taking too few subjects, the school's average point score per candidate at the end of A-level study was still well below the national and local averages.

The school has responded in the short term to concerns in the last inspection about the curriculum by ensuring that sixth form students are on suitable courses and that they are studying an increased but appropriate number of qualifications. The time allocated to each subject has been increased for all subjects which allows all students to have regular focused subject tutorials with their teachers. For the longer term, the school is well down the line in investigating a range of options for expanding the curriculum, including the introduction of performing and visual arts and further collaboration with other local providers. Good progress has been made in establishing systems to monitor and track students' learning, which are overseen by the head of sixth form. Students are set suitably challenging targets and this is raising their expectations and ensuring that underperformance is targeted early.

A key focus of the sixth form improvement plan has been to improve the quality of teaching and learning and, in particular, to ensure that all students are suitably challenged and stretched. Senior leaders have been rigorous in monitoring teaching and have been proactive in providing support, training and advice. This has led to an increasing proportion of lessons being good or better. In particular, staff are now much more confident in using a range of different learning styles and in developing students' thinking skills and encouraging independent learning. Students report that they now find lessons challenging and learning interesting. Nevertheless, some time is still needed for improvements to become embedded so that they make a consistent impact on students' achievement over time.

Unvalidated Key Stage 3 results in 2008 suggest that standards remained similar to those in the previous year. The improved standards and progress in English noted at the last inspection have been maintained. The proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE results, including English and mathematics, increased and now exceeds the national average. Although this represented satisfactory achievement for most students, there was significant underachievement by a small minority of boys that led to most other GCSE measures falling and being below the national average. The school's data indicate that current Year 11 students are making better progress. The school's specialist status in mathematics and computing has had a positive impact in securing pleasing results for students in related subjects and also in establishing good links with the community.

The use of data across the school has improved due to effective staff development, and there is a clear focus in department monitoring on students' achievement. Staff set challenging targets for students which, in turn, leads to challenging departmental

and whole-school targets. Students' progress towards their targets is monitored and reviewed regularly. However, there is a degree of autonomy between departments as to how this is carried out, which leads to some inconsistency. The Directors of Learning are playing an increasing role in identifying and addressing underachievement.

Senior and, increasingly, middle leaders are using a range of information and data to gain a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in provision and outcomes for students. Some departments, such as science, are using information in a skilful way to enhance their understanding of areas of underachievement and to put in place remedial action. However, action plans at all levels do not always show rigorous success criteria or include interim reviews by which senior leaders and governors can judge the success of their actions.

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

Yours sincerely

Maria Dawes
H M Inspector