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5 November 2009

Mr Stephen Liddle
Headteacher
Winifred Holtby School Technology College
Midmere Avenue
Leads Road
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Dear Mr Liddle

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 4 November 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Please pass on thanks to everyone involved in the visit especially the students.

As a result of the inspection on 18 and 19 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise the standards and achievement of students, particularly at Key Stage 3
- ensure consistent and high quality feedback to students to help them to improve
- continue to challenge the poor behaviour of a minority of students and promote better attendance, particularly in Key Stage 4.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Standards have risen over the last two years. The proportion of students getting five or more high grade GCSEs has increased considerably and is approaching the national average. The proportion of students getting five or more high grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is increasing at a slower rate but has reached the National Challenge threshold of 30%. The school's tracking data show that achievement is improving in both key stages. Changes to the curriculum have ensured that courses are more closely matched to the needs of students and as a result, students are making better progress. External test results show that standards in Key Stage 3 are rising.

Action taken to improve the quality of teaching is having a positive effect on students' learning and outcomes. Lesson planning has improved and teachers use a good variety of teaching strategies and learning activities to engage students. There is widespread use of self and peer assessment and inspectors saw instances where this was working very well. In other lessons, however, it was carried out at a more superficial level. In some lessons, especially English, students receive very detailed and helpful written feedback but the quality of feedback across the school is still too variable. The monitoring of teaching has been strengthened and any necessary support or training is tailored to meet individuals' needs.

The school has made good progress in improving the behaviour of the minority of students whose conduct was poor and there has been a marked reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions. Behaviour was good or better in the majority of lessons observed by the school this academic year; a picture reflected in lesson observations conducted by inspectors. However, there is still a sizeable minority of students who lack self-reliance and the ability to work independently. Students report a considerable improvement in behaviour and parents say that it has improved. Attendance rates are improving steadily and the proportion of students who are persistently absent fell by 4% last year. Early indications are that the improvement in attendance is continuing this year.

Standards and achievement in the specialist subjects have been variable and specialist targets have not always been met but curriculum developments within these subjects are beginning to have a positive impact. Teachers from the specialist subjects are leading developments in teaching and the curriculum within school and across the local authority. They also work with local primary schools and external partners.

Leaders and managers have laid solid foundations for improvement. They have very ambitious yet realistic plans for development and know exactly where they are on the journey. They make effective use of a good range of support from the local authority and national organisations. In particular, the National Challenge Adviser has supported the development of middle leaders, the local authority has helped increase the use of assessment to enhance learning and the National Strategies Adviser has worked with the school to improve attendance and behaviour.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector