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25 September 2008

Mr P Brown
The Headteacher
The Lord Silkin School
District Centre
Stirchley
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Dear Mr Brown

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 16 September 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Would you please pass my thanks on to the students and staff for taking the time to talk to me?

The 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 21 and 22 March 2007, the school was asked to:

- increase the levels of challenge in lessons and the pace of learning through more varied activities and more opportunities for students to engage in discussion
- make more consistent use of data on the progress of students in individual subjects to identify more quickly where improvements in achievement are needed
- ensure greater consistency among middle leaders in the evaluation of teaching and the performance of subjects to support more rapid improvement in achievement.

There have been some significant staffing changes since the last inspection. The previous headteacher retired and a new headteacher took up his position at the beginning of September 2008. A new head of mathematics was appointed and took up his position at the beginning of September 2008. Also, at the beginning of September 2008, the heads of English, mathematics and science became assistant headteachers, joining the restructured senior leadership team.

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.

Both external and internal professional development has been used to help teachers improve the pace and challenge of lessons and encourage them to provide more opportunities for pupils to engage in discussion during their lessons. Middle leaders are providing better support for teachers. Both within subject areas and at whole school level, the sharing of good practice is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. However, although teaching is generally at least satisfactory, in order to continue to raise attainment and sustain improvements in progress, the quality of teaching overall in the school needs to improve so that the large majority of lessons are judged to be good or better. Good aspects of the lessons observed include good planning, clear reference to levels and grades, high expectations in relation to behaviour and achievement, students on task and interested, and students not only keen to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding but also confident to do so. Students receive effective oral and written feedback on their work which ensures they have a clear idea of what they need to do in order to reach their target level or improve on their current level. Students comment positively on the good and supportive relationships they have with their teachers, on the variety of activities in their lessons, and the personalised support they receive.

The use of data on students' progress in individual subjects is now well established. It is clearly embedded in whole school and departmental procedures and, as a result, there is much greater understanding among staff of where improvements in pupils' achievement are needed. Targeting of well planned intervention and support strategies is, as a consequence, more productive. The good progress made at Key Stage 3 in 2007 and the improvements in attainment at both Key Stages 3 and 4 attest to this. Discussion of levels and targets is a feature of lessons in most subjects and, as a result, most students have a good understanding of the levels and grades at which they are currently working and their target levels and grades. This is a significant factor in raising expectations and motivating students. The newly introduced assessment and recording procedures are planned to consolidate improvements made in this area.

The prompts and agendas for middle leaders' subject meetings provide clear guidance, which is resulting in improved consistency and quality in middle leaders' evaluation of teaching and performance in their subjects. This is improving their ability to identify areas for improvement within their subject and to support members of their teams. Such strategies are improving the use of data to monitor students' progress and identify where improvement is needed and encouraging the sharing of good practice both within and between subject departments.

The local authority has provided helpful support. The regular school improvement officer visits and reviews have been constructive in identifying areas for development. In order to ensure that good quality support continues, National

Challenge advisory work is planned. In addition to this, specialist subject consultancy work has benefited the work of individual subject departments.

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

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools