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Mr Jeremy Roberts  
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Dear Mr Roberts

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help that you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 January 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information that you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors and to the students whose contributions in discussions were much appreciated.

I note that since the previous inspection you have been appointed as the new Principal and have been in post since September 2008. I also note that from January 2009, an additional deputy Principal, seconded from another school, has been appointed for two terms.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 May 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise the aspirations of students and teachers to improve the achievements and standards of students
- improve the quality of leadership at all levels so that leaders can more effectively monitor the quality of provision and the impact of new assessment processes on students' progress
- make more consistent use of assessment data to track students' progress accurately and ensure that students are helped to reach their full potential.

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 pupils' achievement.

Standards attained by students at the end of the last academic year show a significant improvement from previous years. Year 11 students' attainment was above average. In relation to students' starting points when they entered the school, their progress and achievement were satisfactory overall and good in English. Standards at Year 9 were not as strong. Students' attainment was broadly average, though their progress and achievement were satisfactory. In English in Year 9, students did not make as much progress as they did in mathematics and science as too few students who were capable of attaining the higher grades did so. Students' current standards and levels of progress indicate that the improvements in the 2008 results are being maintained.

These improvements reflect the start the school has made in creating an ethos of raised expectations. This is underpinned well by the protocol you have produced for raising attainment, which has defined staff roles and given them a clear vision and strong direction in respect of raising the aspirations of students and improving their achievements and standards. Students report that teachers are more motivated in lessons and are encouraging and challenging them to attain higher grades. As a result, students feel they are making better progress. This was evident in lessons visited. However, students say that the extent and effectiveness of this drive for improvement is variable across staff. A potentially beneficial recent development is the identification of a well-considered range of interventions in all subjects for students who have been identified as at risk of underachieving. These interventions have been tailored well, based on systematic assessment of students' progress and heads of departments' analysis of the intervention most applicable to the students and their subjects.

The quality of leadership at all levels is beginning to improve. The capacity of the senior leadership team has been strengthened since the previous inspection, not only through your appointment and the addition of another deputy Principal, but also through the sharpening of roles, responsibilities and accountability. Senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the school's performance. The roles and responsibilities of middle leaders are now more closely defined and they are being held more accountable for monitoring the quality of provision and students' progress. Their ability to judge standards, evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and lead sustainable development is beginning to be strengthened through beneficial professional training. Support and coaching from senior leaders and effective middle leaders is contributing to this very well. Governance is also benefiting from the measures being taken to address the areas for improvement. Governors' ability to discharge their responsibilities is being strengthened through the increased monitoring being undertaken by the committee that monitors the school's action plan. It is gathering evidence effectively through, for example, parent focus groups in order to monitor the progress of the school in addressing the issues for improvement.

The school is now collecting and analysing assessment data more frequently and using the data more consistently for setting targets and tracking students' progress. I note that you recognise that there is still variability in the quality of teachers'

assessments. You have introduced moderation procedures to address this issue, though their implementation is at an early stage. A suitable system for setting consistent and suitably demanding targets for all students in every subject is now established. The recent introduction of targets that set both minimum expectations and the highest level of challenge are beginning to raise students' aspirations. Students have a good understanding of their targets and they commented that these were most effectively used to steer their progress in English, maths, science and design and technology. However, their use is more variable across other subjects. The newly established student mentoring system for Year 9 and 11 is also valued by students and provides a good opportunity for monitoring the progress of individual students across all subjects to help them reach their potential. Reports to parents on students' current attainment and targets are now more frequent and are increasing their engagement in their children's learning.

Standards attained by students in design and technology, the school's specialist status subject, are well above average. Students make good progress in most of the subject's specialist courses and their achievement in GCSE examinations is good. The school is aware of the need to disseminate the effective practice in design and technology more widely across the school and is beginning to introduce suitable plans to do this. The subject is well led and managed and targets set for the students are in line with those for other subjects. However, there is scope for setting more ambitious targets, particularly in respect of the higher performing specialist courses.

The external support provided for the school by the local authority has had a good impact on the school's work. The authority's statement of action is fit for purpose and it has helped the school to draw up a well considered action plan that provides an effective steer for improvement. The authority's support for you, for increasing the capacity of the senior leadership team and for training and guiding governors has been very helpful. It has provided suitable challenge through its evaluation of the school's implementation of the action plan.

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

Nick Green  
Her Majesty's Inspector