

26 March 2009

Mr Patrick Earnshaw
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Earnshaw

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 March 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Can I also offer my appreciation for the cooperation and warm welcome extended by your students.

As a result of the inspection in September 2008, the school was asked to:

- Raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics, to enable students to achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.
- Ensure the monitoring of teaching and learning is more robust so that a much higher proportion of teaching is good or outstanding
- Use assessment and tracking information consistently across the school to ensure all students are sufficiently challenged.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress. Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed and took up post in January 2009.

Most recent test and modular GCSE results indicate improved performance in English, mathematics and science. English coursework marks demonstrate improvement on last year's results. In GCSE mathematics, with 50% of assessments completed, some 75% of students are on track to obtain grade C or above. School tracking records show improvement across a range of subjects including English, mathematics, science and engineering. Data tracking students' progress at Key Stage 3, although less well developed than at Key Stage 4, indicates a current trend of improvement. An intensive programme of revision for Year 11 students is demonstrating impact. The use of aspirational targets is promoting a culture of improvement and ambition. Students' progress is now systematically tracked and there is greater consistency in the application of intervention strategies for those at

risk of underachieving. However, guidance to help students reach their targets is uneven. While examples of good marking were seen, there remains variability in the quality and consistency of marking across the school.

The monitoring of teaching and learning is more robust and systematic. The positive involvement of senior and curriculum leaders in promoting better teaching has made a significant contribution to improvement. Professional development opportunities to enhance skills have improved. These changes have resulted in a greater focus on learning and the development of independent learning skills. Students spoke of greater variety and challenge in lessons. All teaching staff now participate in a peer coaching programme to improve teaching and learning. A teaching and learning group has been formed with active participation by many staff and a strong focus on developing skills and sharing good practice. The proportion of good or better teaching has increased. The school has made significant progress in using data to inform performance analysis and to drive improvement strategies. Data is made available to staff who use it increasingly to monitor students' performance and to identify appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

Progress has been made in both improving target setting systems and embedding them into the school's quality assurance processes. Challenging and aspirational targets are set and appreciated by students. Good use of data effectively informs the process. Students in Years 10 and 11 now have a developing understanding of their own targets and the progress they are making. Monitoring and tracking records are thoroughly reviewed by curriculum managers and senior managers. Appropriate training is enabling teachers to improve their assessment skills. The school acknowledges the need to embed monitoring, tracking and intervention strategies at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form.

The new headteacher has quickly and astutely built upon the foundations established by the former temporary headteacher. Leadership and management have been strengthened. A strong emphasis is now placed on the promotion of a culture of continuous improvement and high aspirations for all. With his senior team he has quickly driven this agenda through a collaborative and participatory approach to change. Quality assurance systems have been tightened and greater accountability has been allocated to teaching staff, middle managers and senior leaders. The school's capacity for further improvement has been enhanced. The school is a specialist college for engineering. The impact of recent improvements has been reflected in the improving quality of education within the specialism.

The local authority (LA) has provided effective support to the school, not least in helping to tackle the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The work of LA consultants, particularly in evaluating issues and training needs in teaching and learning, is valued by managers and teachers and has contributed to improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector