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Ms R Williamson
The Headteacher
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Dear Ms Williamson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Victoria Godley and I inspected your school on 10 March 2009, 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 all the staff and students involved during the day for sharing their work with us.

Since the last inspection, there have been difficulties in recruiting new staff and some staff absence in key areas. In order to support the development of literacy across the curriculum, two advanced skills teachers have been appointed in English, and a higher level teaching assistant has been deployed in mathematics to support identified students at Key Stage 4. A new director of humanities, part of the school's specialism, has also been appointed.

As a result of the inspection in February 2008, the school was asked to: ensure consistent use of prior attainment information to plan tasks that challenge every student in all lessons; ensure all day-to-day marking gives students precise guidance on the steps they need to take to reach challenging targets; take rigorous action at all levels on the findings of systematic and frequent monitoring of teaching by deploying sufficient resources to ensure consistency of good lesson practice; and, ensure all staff are fully briefed on the need to respond consistently to students who raise concerns about alleged bullying.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress on addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.



In order to make more use of the prior attainment information to plan tasks that challenge students in all lessons, the school has improved its tracking of students' progress and focused initially on raising standards in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4. This has had the impact of improving the percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades by 12% in 2008, and increasing the proportion including functional English and mathematics by 8%. There has been good support from the local authority, particularly in English and mathematics. Whilst standards at Key Stage 4 are improving, they remain below national averages and some groups of students, especially boys, underperform. Directors of teaching and learning are now identifying students who require additional support and are providing appropriate intervention strategies. However, this initiative has still not had sufficient impact in all curriculum areas. Students' progress data is monitored by middle leaders to ensure the individual prior attainment of all students in all key stages is known by staff. Similar to the last inspection, too many of the lessons observed during this visit are planned only to meet the needs of one level of ability. Differentiation remains an issue for further development.

In order to ensure that all day-to-day marking gives students precise guidance on the steps they need to take to reach challenging targets, all staff have received training on assessment for learning, focusing on formative marking and assessment. All staff are now required to mark students' work regularly and include formative comments. Middle leaders are now more accountable for monitoring individual staff in their department, and this includes the quality of their marking and assessment. However, scrutiny of work and discussion with students demonstrate that work is still inconsistently marked in some curriculum areas, although there is evidence of high quality marking in English and humanities. Good use of post-it notes communicates points for improvement to students, especially at Key Stage 4. Students report that they make quicker progress in subjects where marking is frequent and formative.

Systems for monitoring teaching by senior management have improved. Middle leaders are now more accountable and take more rigorous action at all levels on the findings of systematic and frequent monitoring of teaching to ensure greater consistency. All staff have received training on what constitutes good teaching. This training was positively received and all staff welcomed the clarity of the criteria used to make judgements. As a result, senior staff are much better informed about the day-to-day quality of teaching and learning and resources are therefore deployed to ensure improvement where required. There is clear indication that weaker teachers are being well supported through personalised coaching, and the quality of teaching in Key Stage 4 is improving as demonstrated in better student outcomes in English and mathematics. There are now more opportunities for creativity and active engagement in lessons, a whole school impact of the arts college status. However, recent monitoring by senior staff indicates that the proportion of good or better teaching across the school remains similar to that observed at the last inspection and remains an issue for improvement.

Considerable developments have taken place with an electronic behaviour management system which staff use consistently to record student behaviour. To ensure that all staff are fully briefed on the need to respond consistently to students who raise concerns about alleged bullying, senior managers organised a training day for staff that also included students and parents. An evaluation of the outcome of this training demonstrated that staff felt more confident about dealing with bullying concerns. Teaching assistants and learning mentors have also received training on conflict resolution. The school's detailed monitoring of behaviour and bullying indicates that the number of individual and repeat offender incidents of bullying has reduced. An anti-bullying programme is now delivered to Year 7 students, and the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme is now more embedded. Students report that bullying has reduced significantly and could not recall any recent incidents. Outside professionals are also used well to re-enforce key messages.

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

Clive Kempton
Her Majesty's Inspector