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Dr P B Hayman
Westcliff High School for Girls
Kenilworth Gardens
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Dear Dr Hayman

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and the chair of governors gave when Christine Dick HMI and I inspected your school on 27 February 2009. I am also grateful for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the visit.

As a result of the inspection on 20 and 21 February 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve achievement in Key Stage 4;
- eliminate inconsistencies in teaching and learning in the main school;
- ensure that the whole school tracking of student progress is developed and implemented as soon as possible.

In 2008 inspectors also reported that too many classes were taught by more than one teacher, and the early entry policy was having a negative impact on external results.

At the time of the inspection in 2008 the effectiveness of the sixth form was judged to be outstanding, so the focus of this visit was on the work of the main school.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making outstanding progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement, with very strong leadership and management.

Examination results of girls aged 16 were well above average in 2008. In 2007 56% of GCSE results were graded A* or A, and this rose to 63% in 2008. There were also significant improvements in the proportion of students obtaining eight or more GCSEs at grades A*- B, including English and mathematics, with the percentage rising from 75% in 2007 to 87.5% in 2008. Students' progress in lessons is good overall, with some making outstanding progress in a number of the lessons inspectors observed. This judgement is in line with the school's latest self-evaluation.



The school has made outstanding progress in raising standards and achievement since the last inspection.

There has been a clear and effective emphasis on improving teaching and learning in the last year. The school is accurate in its judgement that, overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the main school is now good. There are many signs that actions taken since the 2008 inspection have led to improvements, such as the broad range of professional development focused on students' learning. This focus is the guiding principle in teachers' planning and in the implementation of their lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use questioning techniques very effectively to ensure students are challenged, and they have good opportunities to develop their skills as independent learners. Staff are skilful at ensuring that the work they set is at an appropriate level. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent, as are relationships between students and teachers. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection.

Prompt action has addressed the weaknesses regarding early entry and those in timetabling identified in 2008. The school's emphasis on academic subjects reflects its selective intake, although vocational options are actively promoted and the take-up of these subjects is good, with a high proportion taking engineering. New courses have been introduced, including applied GCSEs, and triple science for all in Key Stage 4. Collaborative partnerships support the future delivery of new vocational diplomas. These initiatives reflect the school's strong commitment to its specialist status in science and engineering. Opportunities for students' vocational experience through science and engineering days, conferences and specialist projects continue to increase. The school has made good progress in improving the curriculum since the last inspection.

The school was in the process of introducing a new system for tracking students' progress at the time of the last inspection. A comprehensive and effective system for tracking the progress of students is now well established throughout the school, and the senior leadership team has been strengthened with an assistant headteacher with responsibility for this area of work. Details of regular assessments are recorded, progress is monitored and challenging targets are set for each pupil. Unsatisfactory performance by individual students is quickly identified, as are any dips in performance in different subjects. Equally, the school is good at identifying students and departments that are doing well, and during the visit inspectors saw an excellent example of the school's rewards system, with Year 9 students during morning break. Lines of accountability are clearly defined. Members of the senior leadership team are very clear about their responsibilities in holding departments to account, they themselves are accountable to the headteacher and he in turn is held to account by the governing body. The school has made outstanding progress in tracking students' progress since the last inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Keith J Wheeldon
Her Majesty's Inspector