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Mr J R Thomas
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Dear Mr Thomas

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 May 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would be grateful if you could also pass on my thanks to the Chair of Governors, the local authority senior adviser, the school improvement partner, and school leaders and managers for making time to meet with me or talk on the telephone during the day.

As a result of the inspection on 15-16 May 2008, the school was asked to

- Ensure that evaluation is rigorous in all areas of the school's work and that firm action is taken to address known weaknesses such as underachievement in core subjects and the high exclusion rate.
- Improve the coordination of learning support to ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) meet individual progress targets that are based on accurate assessments of their needs.
- Ensure that all teachers assess the progress of students during lessons, so they can adapt lessons to meet students' needs and guide them on how to improve.
- Meet statutory requirements in relation to race and disability equality schemes.

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. However, concern remains about the sharpness and urgency of evaluation strategies at all levels, which is preventing the school from making better than satisfactory progress. Specific improvement is required in relation to the school's duty to promote Community Cohesion.

In 2008, the proportion of five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics was below the national average. Serious issues with coursework procedures led to the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) results being annulled for the whole year group. This had a considerable impact on the overall pass rates, as nearly all students took an ICT qualification worth the equivalent of three GCSEs. Standards in Design and Technology, the school's other specialist subject, were average. However, standards were below average in both English and mathematics and not enough students gained good passes in these core subjects, or at the higher A/A* grades. The school's tracking of current students' progress, supported by submitted coursework, suggests that the 2009 results will be better than in 2008, in line with the national average in all respects including in English and mathematics. Whilst clearly an improvement on the 2008 results, this would nevertheless still only represent satisfactory achievement as students joined the school with average abilities.

Good progress has been made with reducing the high exclusion rate. The Positive Behaviour Policy is having a positive impact; students recognise that behaviour has improved because of the firmer stance taken by most staff. Exclusion for poor behaviour has reduced significantly and is now close to the national average. Nevertheless, some inconsistencies in classroom management remain. The school recognises that good behaviour is characterised by students' setting consistently high standards for themselves with only rare guidance required from staff.

There has been satisfactory progress with coordinating support for students with LDD. Outstanding provision at another local authority school has been shared through a series of visits and reviews. Students' individual education plans have been rewritten in partnership with parents and the students themselves, with more accurate identification of their particular needs. Every student with LDD now has a named key worker, who acts as mentor and coordinator, and students say that this has made a significant difference to them. Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) have been allocated exclusively to the English, mathematics and science departments and this arrangement is also proving very effective. However, whilst LSAs continue to provide good support in lessons, too much teaching does not take into consideration the needs of individual students. Whilst lesson plans always identify the students registered with LDD, plans which show specific tasks and activities to help students make better progress are much less frequent.

Lesson plans also show an increasing use of teachers' assessments during the lesson to help students work more effectively. Even so, inconsistencies remain here as well; whilst all teachers have participated in 'Assessment for Learning' training, not all understand how this is different from other types of assessment, such as testing.

Satisfactory improvements have been made to the Race and Disabilities Equalities policies, bringing them closer into line with statutory requirements. However, there is still more to be done to ensure that the impact of these policies are evaluated regularly and robustly, and reported on annually. In addition, further work is needed

to ensure that the school's Gender Equality Scheme meets requirements. Generally, the school's strategic evaluation processes are not incisive or urgent enough to enable the school to make better than the satisfactory progress reported on by HMI, both here and in the last inspection report. This is the case at all levels including governors, senior leadership, and middle management. An example is with the school's Community Cohesion strategy. The duty to promote Community Cohesion came into effect in September 2007 and yet the schools' strategy remains in draft form, has not been approved by governors, and does not sufficiently cover all requirements. Urgent attention is required in order to ensure that the school has an adequate strategy and action plan in place.

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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector