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Mr Grahame Price  
St Paul's Way Community School  
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Dear Mr Price

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 5 November 2009 and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the students and the chair of the Interim Executive Board, as well as colleagues from the local authority who gave their time to speak to me.

Since the previous inspection there have been considerable changes to staffing. A comprehensive restructure has taken place with newly defined roles and responsibilities. At the end of the summer term nearly half the teachers left. The school has been successful in recruiting new teachers. The leadership team, although now established, is relatively new.

As a result of the inspection on 18 and 19 March 2009, the school was asked to:

- improve the quality of all teaching and learning to at least good, in order to swiftly raise achievement and standards for all students
- build positive relationships between adults, students and parents so that behaviour and safety improve and students take more responsibility for their own learning
- ensure that the information gained from regular assessment is used to help students to understand better what they need to do to improve and achieve challenging targets.

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 students' achievement.

The summer 2009 results show there have been increases in the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE passes, including in English and mathematics; however, standards overall remain exceptionally low. Given the starting points of the



Year 11 cohort in 2009, their progress by the time they left school was inadequate. However, current progress, including lesson observations and school's own data, shows that students' learning and progress is improving and is satisfactory.

Students articulate well how teaching has improved, in particular, the more interactive teaching styles which engage them in lessons. Teachers are generous in their time, offering additional classes during holidays and after school which students take up enthusiastically.

There is a range of well thought out systems to improve teaching. These include working with teachers from other schools, in-house coaching and training and support from external consultants. In addition, there are focused working parties which are helping to develop a professional culture, raise teachers' expectations and enable more collaborative working between teachers. Teachers are held accountable for the quality of learning of their students and this has been linked to their performance management targets.

Although systems to improve teaching are in place, the full impact of these systems at the classroom level needs time to embed. Students report that some teachers set work that is well matched to their needs. However, not all teachers are using the data available to them to plan lessons which effectively tailor their teaching to meet the wide ability range in each lesson.

Teachers are making increasing use of grade descriptors to help students understand how to improve their work and some are adept at helping students structure their writing so it is more complex. Plans are in place to develop literacy across the curriculum, however, these are at an initial stage and teachers are not fully utilising opportunities to develop students' listening and speaking skills across subjects. Teachers' questioning is not always challenging students to give extended answers. Teaching assistants focus students' learning and those observed used good questioning strategies. However, they are not always deployed strategically by teachers to maximise student progress.

Teachers engage well with students and good relationships between students and teachers are apparent. Many students report that behaviour has improved and they feel safe. The reason for this was summed up by one student: 'Teachers' strictness level has gone up.' Students report that teachers are more robust in challenging unacceptable behaviour and although instances of poor behaviour still remain, these are addressed satisfactorily. This is evidenced by the substantial reduction in exclusions, improved attendance and punctuality. Lessons observed were calm, work-focused environments and many students demonstrated good attitudes to learning. They are increasingly resilient in tackling work even when they find it difficult. However, this is not always the case and on occasions there remains low-level disruption in lessons and some off-task behaviour. Some teachers overly lead lessons restricting students' ability to be more responsible for their learning.



A robust system to check the progress students are making against the targets that have been set for them has been established in Key Stage 4 and is now also implemented in Key Stage 3. Teachers' assessment has been moderated to ensure senior leaders are secure in the accuracy of it. This helped the school to predict accurately the standards students attained in the 2009 GCSE examinations.

A strong cycle of regular assessment, analysis and subsequent action to address underachievement is in place. However, like other aspects of the school's work these systems are new and are not yet fully established at the classroom level. Teachers are not fully skilled in using data to plan learning or in ensuring students understand how they can improve. Their marking is inconsistent both in its frequency and quality, ranging from precise formative feedback which will help students to improve to vague comments on attitude. Where informative feedback is given it is not always clear how students act on it. Most, but not all, students know their targets. This includes the level they are working at as well as how they can improve but this practice is not consistent with all teachers.

The visual arts specialism continues to be a strong aspect of the school's provision and standards are higher in these subjects. However, its impact across the range of subjects in the school is limited.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose and its support for the school is comprehensive and well focused. A wide range of external partners, including local schools, National Strategies and London Challenge are providing support and the single integrated improvement plan ensures this is cohesive. Regular and robust monitoring is undertaken by the local authority, with increasing expectation that the school is more involved in this aspect. The Interim Executive Board has detailed knowledge of the work of the school. They have been supportive but have also provided strong challenge to the school. They have ensured appropriate plans are in place to take the school into its next phase of development.

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

Asyia Kazmi  
Her Majesty's Inspector