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Mr M Ryan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ryan

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 18 November 2009 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the governors, students, staff and the local authority lead officer/School Improvement Partner who met with me at short notice.

Since the last inspection, the senior leadership team and administrative staff have been restructured. Two teachers and one administrator left at the end of the summer term and a new School Improvement Partner was appointed in June 2009.

As a result of the inspection on 25 March 2009, the school was asked to comply with current safeguarding requirements and to monitor, record and report on all equalities polices; to improve the quality of marking; and to sharpen the planning, monitoring and evaluation of its work on community cohesion.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement. The good improvement and capacity to develop further is based on the determined leadership of the senior management team, ably supported by the governing body and staff.

The exceptionally high standards achieved in the GCSE examinations in 2008 were sustained in 2009, with an even higher percentage of students exceeding the challenging targets. The provisional results indicate that 77% of students obtained five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, and 92% achieved similar grades in five or more subjects. These outcomes represent the school's best ever results, and confirm a continuing trend of improvement year on year. Similarly, high results were also reached in the specialist subjects,



mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and modern foreign languages.

Immediately after the last inspection, the school made rapid changes to ensure full compliance with safeguarding requirements; these are now fully met. Rigorous systems have been introduced to make sure that there is no negligence; consequently, information is checked frequently and effectively. Senior staff have clear responsibilities for all issues linked to safeguarding and the governors now discharge this aspect of their duty well. The governing body and all staff have undertaken appropriate training on safeguarding. The school has worked very closely with the local authority to audit safeguarding and to establish procedures for all eventualities. There is now increased accountability. The close partnership work with the authority provides a consistent approach to checking information and procedures, particularly as the school now makes very good use of its personnel services.

There has been marked improvement in the recording, monitoring and reporting of the equality policies. These have been reviewed and updated and there are clear reporting lines to senior leaders and governors. Each policy is linked to a member of the senior team and a governors' committee, ensuring that there is oversight of how the policies are implemented and the outcomes monitored, reported and acted on. For example, performance is tracked rigorously and recent analysis shows that high-attaining girls are not performing as well as they should. Strategies have subsequently been put into place to help them maximize their achievement. While systems of reporting are rigorous, the school acknowledges that there is more to be done, for example, in identifying trends and groups when evaluating data in relation to exclusions. Students are very clear that their safety is not compromised and that issues such as bullying and racism are sorted out quickly.

The school has introduced very good marking and assessment systems that enable staff to identify the progress of individuals and groups of students. There is now a model marking policy which departments can tailor to match their own needs. Plans are in place to involve parents in assessing the quality of the marking policy. The quality of marking and teachers' planning are rigorously monitored and good systems are in place to ensure that all staff comply with the policy. These systems are being used with increasing effect to ensure consistency in marking and the use of clear learning objectives. As a result, teachers are using precise objectives that identify the skills students are expected to acquire in each lesson and marking provides clear comments on how they can improve their work further.

The leadership of community cohesion has been strengthened with the appointment of a second senior leader to this area of responsibility. Under clear and purposeful leadership, senior staff have worked diligently to improve the quality of planning, monitoring and evaluation of community cohesion. They have succeeded in promoting it through staff development, reviewing and auditing the provision, and introducing a range of procedures to encourage staff to record and evaluate the



work carried out on developing students' understanding of people living together. Action plans are in place but the evaluation of this work is at an early stage.

The local authority is providing extensive and very good support. The authority has guided the school through the necessary current legislative requirements in relation to the well-being of students. The statement of action and action plan, set within a realistic time frame, are fit for purpose, with clear actions and targets. The subsequent role of the authority when the concerns are no longer evident is also clearly outlined. The intensive guidance, training, and increased monitoring and accountability have quickened the pace of improvement within a short time, particularly as support systems dovetail well with the school's work and findings.

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

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

