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Mrs Susan Gould
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gould

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 November 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Thanks also to the students, staff, governor and local authority officer who gave up their time to meet us.

Since the last inspection, the school has achieved redesignation of its specialist status in mathematics and computing.

As a result of the inspection on 24 and 25 September 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise the achievements of pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly in mathematics
- raise the proportion of good or better lessons, particularly by ensuring that all tasks are interesting to pupils and matched well to their needs
- improve the consistency with which leaders at all levels implement and evaluate school procedures.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The headteacher's vision and ambition to raise achievement in the school is now shared by leaders at all levels and staff across the school. Since the last inspection, the then newly appointed senior leaders have developed into a strong team with clearly defined roles and lines of responsibility. They provide very clear direction for improving the school's performance based on accurate self-evaluation and well planned and highly strategic actions. Systems to support, monitor and evaluate the



impact of these actions empower both subject and pastoral middle leaders to take responsibility for performance within their own areas. Middle leaders are all more effective in their roles and increasingly take the initiative to led improvements at both departmental and school level. All of these have a very positive impact on achievement and standards at both key stages. Consequently, the school's good capacity for further improvement has been consolidated. However, there is no complacency and leaders at all levels recognise, for example, that not all students achieve the highest GCSE grade they can. Staff, students, governors and the local authority officer all spoke of the improvements over the past year, particularly in teaching and learning and the application of data.

Standards, as measured by GCSE results in 2008, were above the national average with 63% of students achieving 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics. However, progress overall was satisfactory, because whilst many students achieved A* to C grades, these were not all at the level that reflected their capability. Performance varied between subjects. For example, achievement in English was good but it was lower in mathematics. More challenging targets are systematically raising expectations across the school and are acting as a key driver for improvement. Significantly improved systems that track and monitor student progress support this. These have enabled both subject and pastoral leaders to target intervention and support for individuals and groups of students. This, together with the improved quality of teaching and learning in classrooms, has led to a 12% rise in the number of students attaining 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics for the cohort completing their GCSEs in 2009. This particularly reflects the improved performance in mathematics and an increase in the proportion of students achieving the highest grades. However, whilst the majority of students made good progress and achieved their challenging targets, achievement for some more able pupils and some girls is lower, varying between subjects.

The school has a very accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Lesson observations now focus on the quality of learning and the progress being made by students. The development of teaching has been at both school and subject level. The development of students' independent learning skills has been a high priority. Teachers say they have become better learners to help students become better learners. Teachers also note that pupils are able to transfer their newly acquired independent learning skills from one subject to another. The quality of teaching is improving with increasing proportions of good and outstanding lessons. Lessons are well paced, varied, interesting and challenging. The excellent relationships between teachers and students, together with the good use of questioning and assessment, also promote learning. Students recognise and appreciate the support they receive, and one student reflected this when she said, 'I know I will always get help when I need it.'

Teachers are now more effectively assessing students' progress through both their written work and responses to questions leading to improvements in the quality of data held by the school. Students' attendance and homework completion rates are included to form the picture of how each individual is progressing. The use of this



data is now embedded across the school. It is used well to plan lessons to meet the needs of all students, particularly those who can achieve higher GCSE grades. As a result, there is a very productive and purposeful atmosphere in most lessons.

The school's specialism in mathematics and computing is used well to drive improvement. There is good access to computers and laptops and most classrooms have interactive whiteboards. However, these are not always utilised fully to enhance learning. All students have information and communication technology (ICT) lessons equipping them to use ICT to support their learning in other subjects. The very large majority achieve at least one GCSE equivalent qualification by the end of Key Stage 4. This enables them to make effective use of ICT to support their learning in other subjects. Year 11, for example, are provided with time in school to use ICT to raise their achievement. Teachers from the mathematics department have been the drivers in developing the new and very effective 'in-house' ICT-based data system.

The headteacher has ensured that the available consultant and advanced skill teacher support have been well used, for example, to enable subject leaders to develop in their roles.

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

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector

