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Mrs Julie Bramley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bramley

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help that you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 8 December 2009 and for the information you provided before and during our visit. Please pass on our thanks to your governors, National Challenge adviser, staff and students for their assistance with our inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the college has changed the structure of the school day so that there is a split lunch and an earlier finish to lessons on a Tuesday to accommodate a two-hour weekly staff development session. The college has also adopted a vertical tutoring system where each year group is subdivided so that there are approximately two or three students from each year group, including the sixth form, in a tutor group of approximately 22 students. Leadership and management have been restructured to ensure greater accountability for raising standards across a wider range of staff, who are organised into four learning communities.

As a result of the inspection on 3-4 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards at the end of Year 11 by increasing the number of qualifications students gain, particularly at the higher grades
- work with parents to improve attendance, especially to reduce the proportion of students who are persistently absent
- raise standards in the sixth form by providing students with realistic guidance and advice in determining their choice of courses.

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



The proportion of students who achieved a recognised qualification in 2009 was higher than in the previous year. However, unvalidated GCSE results showed that only 22% of students achieved five or more GCSE grades at grade C or above which included both mathematics and English. This was lower than the previous year and below the college's target. The college's current assessment information and other inspection evidence show that most students are on track to achieve challenging targets.

Good progress has been made on reducing the number of students who are persistently absent, and overall attendance is improving and is now close to the national average. Almost half the students have good attendance.

The sixth form curriculum is closely matched to the particular needs and aspirations of students. There are good progression routes from Key Stage 4 and there is a good range of courses offered at Levels 1, 2 and 3, many of which are practically based. Students receive sound advice to inform their course selections and this is leading to more students completing courses and improved success rates. Students are well informed about the progress that they are making and know what they need to do to improve. Inspiring and motivating teaching was seen in art and construction lessons and some students in art were seen to be working at a high standard and making good progress. Almost all students from the sixth form go on to further study or employment when they leave the school.

Specialist technology college status is having a beneficial impact on improving students' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. Technology, mathematics and science are well represented in the new leadership and management structure, with staff from these subjects appointed as learning programme directors, lead practitioners or progress managers. **A strong vocational curriculum is contributing to raising attainment and aspirations for students aged 14 to 19.** Specialist targets were not met last year but improvements to the curriculum and effective tracking of progress are having a beneficial impact, and early evidence suggests that current targets are likely to be exceeded.

A National Challenge advisor works closely with the school and has brokered an appropriate package of support from the local authority, which is closely focused on the areas for improvement and on strengthening capacity in English. Partnership arrangements with other local schools are also contributing to improvement.

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

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector

