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Mrs Campbell
Coombe Boys' School
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Dear Mrs Campbell

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff, the governors and the school improvement partner gave us when we inspected your school on 2 December 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Could you also convey our thanks to the students we spoke to during the visit.

Since the school was last inspected, there have been a number of changes to the school's context. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in June 2009, bringing the total to three. As a result of being successful in gaining a capital grant, the school has been able to build new areas to deliver art and design technology and a new reception area within the school. This building project is due to be completed in the spring of 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 5–6 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and progress, particularly in English and mathematics, and for low attainers
- analyse more precisely progress and the impact of actions to improve it, including for groups of pupils and students
- broaden the curriculum range to meet the needs of pupils and students more fully.

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

Standards in Key Stage 4 are improving and the school met its challenging targets in 2009. The proportion of students attaining five or more A*-C at GCSE has improved on the previous year by over 15%. Students who attained five or more A*-C

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grades including English and mathematics also improved. The majority of students achieved their targets set in English and mathematics. The standards achieved by lower attaining students also improved, with many of them achieving their targets. Observations during the inspection confirmed that students make good progress in English. Although never less than satisfactory, progress made within and across other subjects is not consistently as good.

The school met its targets for its specialist subjects of mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) in 2009. The shortage of teachers in both subjects reduced the school's ability to achieve its targets. Suitable experienced staff have now been appointed and school data indicate that Year 11 students are on track to achieve better results in mathematics and ICT this year. The assistant headteacher responsible for specialist subjects has also revised the ICT curriculum so that students are able to follow a more appropriate course. ICT is now used extensively in many subjects, for example English, science, and design and technology. The use of interactive whiteboards by teachers is improving, although there is insufficient use of ICT to support the learning of students with dyslexia.

The school has developed effective tracking and monitoring systems that are scrutinised by senior leaders well. These systems have been instrumental in bringing about the school's success in raising standards. The deputy headteachers work closely with heads of departments to identify regularly how well students are doing in relation to their set targets. The ethos of 'every child matters' is evident in the way every student's performance is examined carefully. This has enabled the school to implement appropriate interventions that are individually matched to the needs of each student who is at risk of underachieving. These strategies are analysed and evaluated well. However, the school recognises that the analysis, recording and availability of data to enable the SEN coordinator to assess the performance of the groups or sub-groups of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities need to be refined further.

Students at Key Stage 3 have remarked positively upon the improvements in the curriculum now being offered by the school. The improved curriculum in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 includes more opportunities for personalised learning. The options in Key Stage 4 have been revised and the curriculum has been improved through, for example, the introduction of new courses such as the diploma in creative media studies. The new building also enables the school to provide a high standard of resources in design and technology. There are good links with colleges to provide students with vocational opportunities and there is good provision for lower attaining students. Students have the opportunity to be entered early for GCSE English and mathematics. This is motivating students well, especially those for whom English is an additional language or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In Key Stage 3, the 'learning to learn' curriculum and the tracking of students' extra-curricular experiences are having a positive impact on their achievement. The breadth of curriculum in the sixth form has also improved and now includes vocational courses such as media, performing arts, business studies and travel and

tourism. The choice of extra-curricular clubs and activities offered to students has been extended and includes many non-sport activities such as a film club, animation, maths – code breakers, business, drama and yoga. This adds much to their enjoyment of learning

Senior leaders have worked hard to stabilise the fluctuating levels of staffing especially during the last year and the new facilities for art and design technology have had a positive impact on students' learning. The school's strategies to further improve behaviour are having good effect, students have reported a marked improvement in behaviour in lessons and around the school. Effective data systems are being used well to bring about improvements in standards. The local authority's school improvement partner works effectively with school leaders to improve the school's performance. The support from the local authority for English as an additional language support has enabled the school to improve classroom practice for these students.

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

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector