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Mr J Parker  
Headteacher  
Manshead C of E VA Upper School  
Dunstable Road  
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Dear Mr Parker

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff and the students gave when I inspected your school on 1 December 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit, the time you and your deputy gave to the discussions and to the joint observations of lessons during my visit.

The school continues to experience difficulty in recruiting staff but is overcoming this challenge by training its own teachers using the graduate teacher training programme. The school reports that the level of support from the Local Authority has improved and that there is a clearer vision of how schools might work together to improve standards.

As a result of the inspection on 8 and 9 October 2008, the school was asked to:

- To raise achievement and standards, ensure that systems for tracking and analysing students' progress and setting targets operate consistently well across the school.
- Ensure that all teaching enables students to play an active part in lessons and develop the skills of independent learning they need for the future.
- Increase the rigour with which the impact of initiatives is monitored and evaluated.

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 provisional outcomes of the 2009 GCSE results show a small improvement on the results secured in 2008 from 59% to 60% achieving five A\* to C grades. Average point score rose to the highest the school has ever achieved. However, GCSE results including mathematics and English were 38%, well below the national figure, because of poor results in English. Effective action has been taken to improve the work of the English department by providing stability in staffing, engaging consultancy from partner schools with outstanding work in English and allocating additional senior management support. As a result, students in the current Year 11 are on track to meet their targets in 2010, which represents further improvement.

The mathematics department exceeded its specialist college targets in 2008 and maintained this improvement in 2009 because of strengthened leadership and management and better intervention strategies. Science missed its specialist college targets in 2008 and 2009 because of instability in staffing. The school is addressing these issues by employing two teachers on the graduate teacher training programme to provide continuity.

The school has developed a robust system for assessing and tracking students' progress. This has enabled staff to quickly identify areas of underachievement and to intervene where required. A similar system has been put in place in the sixth form with the result that the pass rate for A-level rose from 91% to 97% and the number of passes at the higher grades improved dramatically.

Inspectors conducted ten lesson observations, four of which were joint observations with the head teacher and the assistant headteacher. One lesson was outstanding, four were good and five were satisfactory. This confirmed the school's own monitoring, through subject reviews, as broadly accurate. In the more effective lessons pace was brisk and students were encouraged to develop their own independent learning skills. Less effective teaching did not engage and involve students sufficiently and pace was too slow. The school has introduced a new marking policy which is working well and links to the assessment and reporting schedule. As a result, the marking seen was good, with clear and helpful annotation so that students know what they have to do to improve their work. A short observation of a group of students with autism showed effective support based on good relationships.

The senior management team are now monitoring the impact of initiatives rigorously. For example, in a bid to improve behaviour and attitudes to learning the school has introduced a college system with vertical Learning Guide (tutor) groups. Monitoring and evaluation of the new system has demonstrated a fall in exclusions for disruptive behaviour and a fall in the use of sanctions, such as detentions.

Staff vetting and students' safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements. Senior managers are focused on improving areas of weakness and self- evaluation is accurate. Attendance is improving and more vocational and entry level qualifications have been added to the curriculum so that it better meets the needs of all students. Senior managers share the ambition and drive to make significant progress, but not all learning managers are as equally dynamic and focused. However, systems are now in place and embedded to enable the school to make sustained 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

Margaret Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

