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Mr P Marshall  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Marshall

### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 8 December, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided during our visit. Please pass on my thanks to your staff and students for taking the time to speak to us. Since the last inspection an associate headteacher has been appointed to work in partnership with you as you prepare plans for a new school building.

As a result of the inspection on 23 September 2008, the school was asked to use the opportunities created by the new curriculum to promote independent learning and increase the pace of progress; improve standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form; and raise attendance in line with the national average.

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.

Attainment in English and mathematics is below the national average when students start in Year 7 and it remains below average at the end of Year 11. The proportion of students who reach the expected level in mathematics by the end of Year 9 has increased and is now in line with the national average. A higher than average proportion of students does not reach the expected level in English by the end of Key Stage 3. The percentage of students who achieved five good grades at GCSE including English and mathematics fell slightly in the most recent examinations because not as many students achieve a grade C in mathematics as the school



expected. However the proportion of students who gained five good passes at GCSE overall continued to rise and is now in line with the national average.

In the sixth form the school knows that standards and achievement based on recent examinations are still not high enough. Changes to extend the leadership of the sixth form and improve the range of courses have been too recent to demonstrate impact. In lessons seen by inspectors, students are now making satisfactory progress. Students currently in the sixth form and those thinking of joining next year are excited about recent improvements and the wider range of courses available.

The new 'Opening Minds' curriculum introduced in Year 7 is an exciting initiative but it is too early to measure its impact as it was introduced in September 2009. The school has used the curriculum innovatively to introduce Key Stage 4 early in Year 9 which enables students to either move on to take AS courses early or re-sit GCSE examinations to improve their grades. Teaching and learning remain satisfactory but there is a wide variation in the quality, which ranges from outstanding to inadequate. Whilst improvements have been made in some areas and the school has successfully trained many of its own teachers, weaknesses remain elsewhere.

Learning objectives in lessons are consistently shared with students, most of whom are well motivated. In the best lessons teachers share with students the grade or level expected of them. This is done very well in English in GCSE courses. Students respond well to lessons with a variety of tasks that enable them to participate in practical work and group discussions. They commented on how teaching has improved in many subjects. Some teachers successfully get students to ask questions of each other to elicit extended replies. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Extension work for the more able or modified work for those who find learning difficult is at times set very well, but is lacking in other lessons.

In less successful lessons learning objectives are tasks not linked to a particular grade or level. Activities are dominated by teachers talking from the front or directing questions so that only a few students are given the opportunity to respond. Students generally know their current levels and targets but not necessarily how to reach them. Marking is at times limited to ticks or brief praise comments that do not show how work can be improved. The pace of learning can slow down in long double lessons where not all teachers are able to sustain interest through sufficiently varied activities.

The extended senior leadership team has already taken action to improve provision in the sixth form and Key Stage 3 and are focussed on bringing further improvements to teaching and learning through regular monitoring. The headteacher and associate headteacher have a very accurate view of the strengths and areas for development in teaching.

Following the most recent inspection the level of attendance improved to close the gap with the national average. However the current level of attendance has fallen once again and it remains below the national average. The school is currently

without an attendance officer although an appointment has been made for next term. The school's procedures for responding to persistent absence are not rigorous enough and good attendance is not sufficiently rewarded. All safeguarding procedures are in place and are rigorously monitored.

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

Mark Sims

Her Majesty's Inspector