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Dear Ms Gregory

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your college on 25 November 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Discussions with members of the leadership team, middle leaders and students were also very helpful in evaluating progress.

As a result of the inspection on 13–14 November 2008, the college was asked to:

- strengthen the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, identifying their needs and providing appropriate support at an earlier stage
- sharpen the role of some middle leaders to ensure that they raise standards and achievement
- ensure greater consistency in the setting of realistic but challenging targets, and monitor students' progress towards meeting them more rigorously and systematically.

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

Since the last inspection temporary leadership arrangements at senior level have had a significant impact on stability, and impeded the pace of change and progress. Within the last few weeks the acting headteacher has been appointed as the substantive headteacher. This provides a good opportunity to resolve remaining temporary arrangements.



In recent years standards have been significantly below the national average in English and mathematics; students have not made the progress expected from Key Stage 2. Steps taken following the 2008 results have led to a few improvements. The number of students taking non-accredited courses with external providers has been reduced, and the proportion of students entered for English and mathematics examinations has increased. A good improvement in GCSE science helped to increase the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grade passes, although the proportion achieving this national benchmark when English and mathematics are included remains below average. College leaders recognise the need to raise standards further and to ensure that all groups of learners reach their potential.

In response to the last inspection a summer school took place for targeted students in Year 6 with special educational needs. Information was used successfully to form a nurture group in Year 7 for vulnerable learners. A specific literacy programme has been introduced this term in Year 7. Leaders have identified the need to improve provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. An external review has been conducted to support changes in work practices, the deployment of staff and the identification of training needs.

Senior leaders have a broadly accurate view of the college's strengths and areas for improvement that is increasingly involving middle leaders. Monitoring information is beginning to be collected to support a more rigorous approach although evaluation is a weaker aspect. Improvement plans at whole college and subject level do not focus sufficiently on the precise actions to be taken supported by measurable success criteria. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are not detailed enough to support the timely tracking of progress, or to ensure that equalities targets are embedded.

Systems are now in place to collect assessment information to support the monitoring and tracking of progress. This is most effective in Year 11 to assist in the identification of students at risk of not meeting their targets. The system is not sufficiently rigorous and robust to drive improvement across the college. The use of more challenging targets has raised the expectations of teachers and middle leaders, and is supporting greater accountability for students' progress. Expertise in analysing assessment information and evaluating the progress of different groups of learners is at an early stage. A staff group is in place to oversee developments, and to support staff training.

Senior leaders have worked hard in difficult circumstances to raise the expectations of staff and to introduce initiatives to tackle identified weaknesses and inconsistencies. They recognise that time is needed to demonstrate impact more securely, and to build capacity across leadership, including governance. Recent changes to the leadership and management structure are supporting greater clarity in roles and the distribution of responsibility for learning and progress. A consultant has provided additional capacity this term to support this process. In the majority of



lessons observed, students showed interest and made satisfactory progress, but expectations are often not sufficiently high to accelerate students' rate of progress. Assessment is not used well enough to inform the planning of lessons for individuals and groups of learners, or to adjust activities on the basis of feedback during the lesson. Teaching strategies do not consistently ensure that all students participate in lessons, for example in partner and group work.

The specialist business and enterprise status is supporting an expansion of courses and cross-curricular links. Students have the opportunity to develop their economic understanding through the financial aspects of enterprise days. Links with local schools and the business community are helping to raise the profile of the specialism.

The positive picture presented in the last inspection report concerning the sixth form continues to apply. Checks on staff are very thorough and fully meet current government safeguarding requirements.

I hope that you found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your college. The letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić
Her Majesty's Inspector

