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1 December 2009

Mr Jim Clarke
Pool Hayes Community School
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Dear Mr Clarke

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when my colleague and I inspected your school on 25 November 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during the visit. Please extend my thanks to those members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and students we met, and the local authority representative I spoke to on the telephone.

The school became a Foundation School in September 2009 with a newly constituted governing body and a new Chair of the Governing Body. Since the last inspection, a new head of music and an advanced skills teacher in mathematics have been appointed. The school's partnership with another local school to share the teaching of sixth form courses has ended because the partner school will be closing. The popularity of the sixth form has been unaffected with recruitment leading to an increase in the number of sixth form students.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 November 2008, the school was asked to raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress, improve the quality and consistency of teaching, improve the tracking and analysis of pupils' progress and ensure there is a daily act of collective worship and that religious education is provided in Years 10 and 11.

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 school has successfully increased attainment at Key Stage 4. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above has risen to 63%. Although when English and mathematics are included, this proportion drops to 32%, nevertheless this is an increase on the previous year and demonstrates an improving trend, which has now lifted the school above the National Challenge target. In addition, the proportion of students gaining the top grades in English and

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mathematics at GCSE has also improved. Projections for 2010, based on early entry and tracking information, indicate that the trend of improvement is likely to continue. Lesson observations indicate that students are making expected progress in their learning.

Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and in the curriculum, which now meets all requirements, are engaging students more effectively. The use of assessment to support learning is a positive feature in many lessons, and excellent examples of this were seen in a drama and an English lesson. Work is now more closely matched to students' abilities and there is greater emphasis on levels and grade criteria. However, there is still significant variation in the quality of teaching and learning between subjects and as a consequence in the attainment and progress students are making. The monitoring and tracking of students' progress at whole-school and faculty level ensure that where underachievement is evident, appropriate intervention is put in place. The introduction of a new behaviour management strategy, based on positive discipline and rewards, is having a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning and on their behaviour. These developments are also leading to improved attendance and punctuality, a reduction in the number of exclusions and a very low proportion of students who are not in education, employment or training on leaving school.

There is a strengthening capacity to sustain the current levels of improvement. Accurate self-evaluation and clear plans reflect what needs to be done to consolidate existing improvements and bring about further improvement. Successful strategies have been introduced to evaluate the school's effectiveness, in particular in relation to pupil tracking systems. Improvements to the system for reviewing the performance of faculties and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning have also been introduced. However, the present system is not identifying weaknesses in teaching and learning across subjects quickly enough to enable the school to target support strategies promptly. Despite this, improved opportunities are available to share good practice in teaching and learning and this is enhanced by the valuable contribution of the expanded group of advanced skills teachers.

Pool Hayes has specialist arts college status, successful redesignation of which took place in April 2009. Its specialist status has improved provision and is contributing to the improvements in teaching and learning and in attainment.

Effective support has been provided by the local authority and by the Black Country Challenge and School Improvement Partners and the school has responded positively to the critical evaluation provided by such external partners.

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

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector



Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-visit letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority – Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – except for academies
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.schools@dcf.gov.uk)
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority – where appropriate
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

Lead inspector