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Mr Paul Moss
Headteacher
Montgomery High School
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Dear Mr Moss,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 October 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on our thanks to the students as well.

Since the last inspection in October 2008 the school has become a Trust School and there have been several changes to the school staff. A new Chair of Governors was appointed in July 2009.

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

- raise levels of achievement, particularly at Key Stage 3 and for the higher attaining students
- improve the proportion of good or better teaching and disseminate best practice more widely
- increase the rigour of monitoring and self-evaluation so that it better informs decision making
- ensure the quality and consistency of students' academic support so that they all know clearly how to secure improvement.

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.

The school has clearly demonstrated its better capacity for sustained improvement, most notably in the significant improvement in outcomes in 2009. The standards reached by students who completed their education at the school in 2009 were much higher than in 2008 and students made good progress from their starting points. School data show that a very large majority of students achieved five or more higher grade GCSEs and the majority gained five higher grades including English and mathematics. In many subjects and courses more students gained the highest A* and A, or distinction grades. At the end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments show that more students reached both the expected levels and the higher levels. The school met many, but not all, of its challenging targets.

In lessons, students show good attitudes to learning. In the best lessons, expectations are high and students make good progress because of effective teaching with plenty of challenge and variety, and a brisk pace. Students know their targets and are keen to do well. A range of strategies to improve the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment has been developed. The school continues to use the latter part of Wednesday afternoons for staff development sessions when students are offered enrichment activities delivered by external tutors, or allowed to go home with parental permission. Students receive less than the recommended 25 hours curriculum time. Professional development for teachers includes the sharing of good practice, coaching and mentoring. Planning now uses a standardised format with clearly identified objectives and outcomes. A specific project is currently devoted to improving provision in English and mathematics. There are fortnightly meetings with these teams to discuss progress at individual student level.

Monitoring now includes unannounced brief visits to lessons to check effectiveness, and random sampling of students' knowledge of their targets and progress. A well judged series of interventions to support different groups has had a demonstrable impact. These groups have included high attainers and those in danger of missing GCSE C grades. Assertive mentoring for underperformers has also contributed to raised standards and better progress. Many of the measures applied at Key Stage 4 are beginning to be applied to Key Stage 3 to further accelerate progress during years 7 to 9. Inconsistencies in marking remain, and senior leaders are aware of the need to tackle this with more vigour. In English, mathematics and science teaching is not yet consistently good. Raising boys' achievement in English remains a priority. Curriculum changes are being made in both mathematics and English with the aim of further improving A*-C pass rates. In science, where the percentage of pupils achieving at least two A*-C at GCSE or equivalent is below average, a new vocational science course is being developed. A new science curriculum with a stronger emphasis on skills and active learning has also been introduced at Key Stage 3.

Staffing difficulties in the school's specialist area of modern foreign languages have been resolved and students are making better progress in these subjects. There

were better GCSE grades in 2009 and the school met its targets. In keeping with its specialist language status, the school continues to encourage students to participate in overseas visits to various European countries.

At senior management level a clearer understanding of performance and tracking data ensures that underachievement is tackled. Staff at all levels are making better use of available data and taking remedial action where needed. Students now have a better understanding of how to improve their work. New initiatives are more closely monitored and evaluated. Further dissemination of newly introduced systems is planned. Self-evaluation is more realistic in its judgements. Closer links with a local teacher training institution have been forged to assist with the future recruitment of teachers. The local authority has provided valuable consultant support, particularly in English, mathematics and science. At the time of the last inspection, governors had not reviewed school policies in a timely manner. Under the new Chair of Governors an audit of policies has been carried out and a programme for reviewing these established.

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

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector