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Mrs L Dalkin
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Dear Mrs Dalkin

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 20 October 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 24 to 25 September 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise the attainment of students, particularly in English and mathematics
- improve the overall quality of teaching by sharing the best practice within the school
- improve the use of assessment data to inform teaching and ensure all students have clear guidance on how to reach their targets
- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring in all departments and identify those strategies that are most effective in raising standards of attainment.

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 remains well below average. This is demonstrated in the 2008 GCSE results, which were significantly below those seen nationally, including in the key subjects of English and mathematics. The students taking these examinations entered the school with well-below average attainment at Key Stage 2, and the results obtained represent satisfactory progress in comparison with similar students in other schools. The most recent GCSE results, as yet unconfirmed, show a similar picture overall to 2008 but with improvements in English. Many pupils reach challenging targets. Observations during the inspection and data provided by the

school confirm that pupils make at least satisfactory progress relative to their starting points and that progress in mathematics is improving.

In mathematics, although there were no improvements in the 2009 GCSE results, the school's data on modular examinations show that students in the current Year 11 are in a position to gain considerably better results than in 2008 and 2009. This, together with a sustainable improvement in English, represents satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

Evidence seen during the inspection suggests that there have been some improvements in the quality of teaching. Several recent appointments, including in mathematics, have strengthened the teaching team. Suitable strategies for improving teaching and learning are in place; some, such as the improved use of information and communication technology, are beginning to have an impact, but others are at an early stage. Examples of good strategies include more formal opportunities for teachers to share good practice and more focused support for teachers' professional development. However, the school does not have sufficiently reliable and detailed information that demonstrates how teaching is improving.

A clear system is in place for recording data on students' progress. The school has recognised the need for ongoing work to assure the reliability of the information that is entered. Heads of department are beginning to use the information it provides to target interventions for individual students. The use of assessment data is variable across different departments and students do not know the current level of their work and their target grades in all subjects.

Middle managers monitor work in departments through classroom observations, informal visits to lessons and work scrutiny. The rigour of the monitoring process has improved since the last inspection, but practice remains inconsistent across the school. Managers are applying well-chosen strategies for improving attainment, including better teaching and more focused monitoring and support.

The developing skills of senior and middle leaders are contributing to the school's increased capacity for sustained improvement. The school continues to work effectively with outside agencies to promote good attendance and reduce the number of persistent absentees. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate, and includes focus on the performance of groups. The school is now producing sharper improvement plans, including at departmental level, where variations in practice are being addressed. Senior and middle leaders recognise the school's strengths and weaknesses and show a good understanding of how they can contribute to school improvement. Middle leaders are increasingly held to account.

The school's specialist status has a clear impact on provision and outcomes for students. For example, in 2008, over 80% of students gained two or more A* to C grades in GCSE science, compared with a national average of 50%. Numbers opting to take A-level courses in the school's specialist subjects are also growing. Leaders

and managers from within the specialist subjects have taken the lead in training other staff on the use of data and sharing good practice on tracking students' progress.

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

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector