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Friday 2 July 2010

Mr John Martin
Oldbury College of Sport
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Dear Mr Martin

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 1 July 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the representatives of the governing body who met me, the staff and students.

Since the last inspection there are four new members of the expanded senior leadership team.

As a result of the inspection on 2–3 July 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve the quality of teaching by consistently marking students' work and by regularly checking throughout lessons that students understand the learning intentions and that students of all abilities are appropriately challenged
- ensure that strategic planning focuses on the few key issues essential to raise standards
- work with parents to improve attendance.

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

Since the last inspection, students' attainment has improved significantly. In 2009 at the end of Key Stage 4, 67% of students gained five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. This is one percentage point below the national average and shows the rapid improvements the school has made from 58% five or more A* to C grades in 2008 and from 53% when the school opened in 2007. In 2009, the proportion of students with grade C or above in English rose slightly to 39% compared with 38% in 2008.



The proportion gaining a grade C or above remained the same for mathematics at 44%. The school has correctly identified the weaknesses these subjects. The school's own data predict that 60% of students will gain grade C and above in English and 52% a grade C and above in mathematics. Students make outstanding progress overall. All groups of vulnerable learners, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known to be eligible for free school meals, make good progress.

The school, since its opening, has taken a robust line on raising attainment and improving the progress of students. The headteacher's determination to ensure a first-class education for all students is shared by all staff. Together, they have worked successfully to foster a culture of high aspirations and positive attitudes to learning. The staff have formed a teaching and learning community group which focuses on improving learning and sharing each others' good practice. As a result, the majority of the teaching is now good or better.

All staff confidently uses a wide range of data to track students' progress, and to plan and set appropriately challenging work for all. The school has also developed a number of staff groups whose function is to support improvements in teaching and learning, and students' understanding of their own learning. The raising achievement team closely monitor students' work and, consequently, students are well supported in their learning through carefully tailored interventions. A wide selection of additional support is offered, and taken up by students, to ensure they do not fall behind if they have been absent or do not fully understand their work. For example, mentoring staff and teaching assistants work in classrooms to ensure that all students understand and keep up. Additionally, opportunities are provided for students to practise their skills and consolidate understanding in sessions on Saturdays, and in extra English and mathematics lessons.

A vigorous approach has been used to improve students' literacy and numeracy. In the upper school, following an audit of students' understanding of English and mathematics, all lessons now have a literacy or numeracy starter activity which is closely aligned to the subject being studied. Following the first term of this, students were tested and had significantly improved their scores. This year, a group of Year 9 students has been entered early for GCSE mathematics and teachers' predictions are that this entire group will get at least a C grade. Inspectors' observation of teaching and learning concur with this judgement. Learning in English and mathematics lessons proceeded at a brisk rate. Teachers confidently questioned students and probed their answers so that students explained their thinking well. Discussions in small groups and pairs were skilfully led so that all students understood the work and enjoyed it. Teachers' feedback to students during lessons about how they could improve their work was usefully detailed. So, too, were the helpful comments from fellow students. However, teachers' written feedback in their marking of books does not always provide a similarly high quality of explanation.



Attendance has improved. The school's data indicate that students' attendance is 91.3% for the current academic year. The school has worked hard to reduce persistent absence from 8.2% to 7.7%, and is aware that students with special learning needs and /or disabilities are most numerous in this group. The school is currently working with a number of agencies to provide families with the necessary support to ensure students attend well.

The headteacher and expanded senior leadership team have successfully improved the school's capacity for sustained improvement through embedding many initiatives. The capability of middle managers to monitor and improve teaching and learning has grown. Middle managers' skills are boosted because they are seconded to the leadership team for periods of between one and three years. As a result, they have a much better strategic understanding of the school's data and their use to transform learning in the classroom. Professional development opportunities have been provided for younger staff to help them take on responsibility and develop their leadership potential.

The management of the school's specialism in sports has also been used strategically to improve students' concentration and resilience as learners, and to improve their health. It has encouraged take up of studying post-16. This is reflected in the school opening its own sixth form from September 2010.

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector