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Mr Patrick Daley
Headteacher
Clifton: A Community Arts School
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Dear Mr Daley

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 1 December 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Please pass on thanks to everyone involved in the visit especially the students.

As a result of the inspection on 9 and 10 January 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve standards and achievement across the curriculum, particularly in relation to students' skills in literacy
- improve the quality and consistency of teaching and ensure that lessons are well matched to students' abilities and involve them more actively in their learning
- improve the attendance and behaviour for the significant minority of students for whom they are inadequate
- develop a stronger partnership with parents.

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.

Standards have risen steadily over the last three years but are still low. The proportion of students leaving school with five high grade GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was stubbornly low for several years but has risen to 29% this year, which is just below the National Challenge threshold of 30%. This was achieved with the weakest Year 11 cohort for many years. There has been a steady rise in standards in English at Key Stage 3 and GCSE English results improved this year. Internal tracking data show that standards and achievement are improving across the school and progress in the vast majority of lessons is at least satisfactory. Changes to the curriculum have made a key contribution to these improvements.

September 2009



Strategies to improve the quality of teaching are having a positive effect on students' learning and progress. Teachers are well informed about the individual needs of their students and are beginning to use the information to plan activities that cater to the full range of ability in each group. Peer and self assessment are used increasingly to augment learning and effective questioning is utilised well to check understanding. Successful cross-curricular links are engaging boys in literacy tasks and supporting the development of independent learning skills in Key Stage 3. The majority of students participate well in lessons. In weaker lessons, however, low level disruption hinders learning and students do not take sufficient pride in their work. Inspectors also observed examples of teachers using incorrect spoken English which hampers the literacy development of students.

Attendance has improved considerably over the last year. The overall attendance rate rose by almost 2% and the proportion of persistent absences fell by over 5%. This has been achieved by introducing a wide range of incentives to encourage good attendance; text messages to keep parents informed of any absence; and by staff working very effectively together to provide a holistic approach to tackling persistent absence.

Behaviour has improved. The number of fixed term exclusions has been halved and there have been no permanent exclusions for three years. Students say that fights and bullying incidents are now rare. Students' behaviour has improved around school but a small number of students are still talking over the teacher or shouting out in some of the weaker lessons.

Communication with parents has improved with the introduction of regular newsletters, text messaging and the use of 'praise postcards'. The programme of family learning courses is well supported and has strengthened relationships between school, parents and the community. Responses to the latest parental survey were positive about the relationship between them and the school.

The specialism is having an increasing impact across the curriculum and is helping to build students' self esteem and develop their learning skills. Community links and those with primary schools are strengthening. Specialist staff are taking more responsibility for staff development and relying less on external trainers. The majority of specialist school targets have been met but earlier staffing shortages affected attainment in a few areas.

Senior leaders have ambitious but realistic plans for the school. They prioritise well and have introduced a series of well planned strategies but it is too early to see the full impact on students' outcomes. The monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure and meeting current requirements. The school is well supported by the local authority and benefits from the senior advisor for English being based at Clifton. The National Challenge Adviser has also provided much help and guidance.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector