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Mr Tim Brookes
Hanson School
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Dear Mr Brookes

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Mr Gulab, Mr Lovgreen and I inspected your school on 25 February 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. We also welcomed the opportunity to talk with other members of staff and students. Please pass on our thanks to all those involved.

The headteacher took up his appointment in April 2008 and was immediately faced with several challenges. These included difficulties in recruiting staff to key roles, such as to teaching posts in mathematics and technology, and the ongoing management of the school's complex refurbishment and building programme under the 'Building schools for the future' initiative.

As a result of the inspection on 10–11 March 2008, the school was asked to:

raise achievement and standards, in particular at Key Stage 3

- ensure that teaching and learning are good across the whole school
- improve monitoring systems to ensure greater consistency and effectiveness across the school.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made inadequate progress in making improvements and



satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Although the rate of improvement has quickened recently, the school has made insufficient progress in raising standards and achievement. Consequently, too few students are now making the progress of which they are capable between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.

The picture of attainment varies across the key stages. The school's own data for Key Stage 3 shows that in 2009, attainment in English and mathematics rose slightly when compared to the previous year. This slowly improving pattern is evident in most other subjects, although there have been good gains in some subjects, particularly art, physical education and technology. Attainment in science, however, dropped by around 10%; though this was partly as a result of teacher assessments being made early, at the end of Year 8, so that students' could start GCSE science in Year 9. Changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum implemented in September 2009, especially the stronger focus on literacy and numeracy through themed activities, are already having a positive impact on accelerating students' progress and attainment.

At the end of Key Stage 4 in 2009, whilst students with a statement of special educational need achieved well, there was significant underachievement for the vast majority of students. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 was low; declining significantly when compared to the previous year. A three year downward trend in performance, in the majority of performance measures, indicates a widening gap when compared to national expectations for the end of this key stage. School data suggests that this decline is being halted, but the rate of improvement is not sufficient at present to indicate that satisfactory performance is likely in 2010.

Students usually enter the sixth form with standards that are below average and attainment is generally low. Nonetheless there is an improving picture and consequently, more students in the sixth form are now making satisfactory progress and they are currently performing particularly well in history, psychology, information and communication technology and business studies.

The need to tackle staffing issues, including difficulties in recruiting teachers to mathematics and technology, has held back the rate at which the proportion of good or better teaching has risen since the last inspection. There is evidence of some improvements in teaching, and at present around 55% of teaching is good or better. This is beginning to raise standards in some subjects, notably in mathematics, science, physical education, Spanish and some vocational courses. Nevertheless, too high a proportion of lessons remain no better than satisfactory, with the result that students are not making the good progress required to close the attainment gap. Teaching, learning and assessment are currently too varied between subjects and some small pockets of inadequate

teaching remain. Teachers have begun to support each other and to share ideas about what does and does not work in lessons, and school leaders have recently embarked upon a programme of routine lesson observations and departmental reviews. Although improving, attendance remains low and this, coupled with instances of poor punctuality, also limits the progress and attainment some students make.

The school's specialist status in technology is broadening curriculum choices for students. It is central to the school's current activities to engage parents more in their children's mathematics learning and plays a positive role in fostering good relationships with local primary schools. The specialist subjects underpin the school's ambitions to play a bigger role in the community, once building work is completed in March 2011. The school failed to meet its specialist targets in mathematics, science and technology at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2009, but this was largely because of staffing difficulties that have now been resolved.

The leadership team has been expanded and management structures across the school are being refined and strengthened. The restructured leadership team has established a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses as a result of analysis and departmental reviews that have, for the most part, taken place since September 2009. These changes give school leaders an increasingly accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and priorities for future action, enabling them to drive improvement forward with increased effectiveness. Monitoring information is being used more effectively to promote greater consistency across the school; although school leaders are aware that planning and procedures need further refinement to give them a sharper focus. The school has received satisfactory support from the local authority since it intensified its engagement at the start of the 2009/2010 academic year. Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements.

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

Wendy Ripley
Her Majesty's Inspector