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Mr Stuart Hemingway
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hemingway

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you, your colleagues and students gave when Paul Lowery HMI and I inspected your school on 9 June 2010, for the time you gave to our telephone and email correspondence, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

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

- secure the improvement in achievement across all key stages
- increase the proportion of good teaching
- match the teaching of lower achieving students more closely to their individual needs
- increase the impact of the specialist status within the school.

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.

Examination results in Year 11 rose to average in 2008, reflecting a campaign to improve learning. Results fell back in 2009, however. The proportion of students attaining five or more higher grade passes in the GCSE examination rose to close to average in 2009, but the proportion attaining five such passes including English and mathematics fell from above average to below. The school has since strengthened its efforts to: improve the accuracy of assessment and tracking of progress to give a reliable picture of how students are doing; targeting additional support more

precisely on those students most in need; improve attendance, which now reflects the national average, and reduce significantly persistent absenteeism; reduce exclusions from lessons and school, and improve the motivation of more reluctant students; broaden the curriculum to improve its appeal to students; and provide deeper evaluation, support and challenge to staff to help them improve teaching, learning and assessment. Currently, information from routine assessments and the results for students in Year 11 who have taken early entry to external examinations indicate that attainment, including English and mathematics, has risen to average and continues to rise. Evidence was seen in lessons of students making satisfactory or good, and sometimes outstanding, progress. Improving achievement is still work in progress, as recognised by the senior leaders. The school now needs time to sharpen its practice further, especially in using assessment to guide more differentiated teaching in lessons.

The school has focused sharply on strengthening teaching and learning. Its teaching and learning group has helped staff to improve. Staff training is based on a clear identification of need and has been provided by outside specialists and staff within the school. The lessons observed showed greater consistency in planning, sequencing, pace and students' engagement. This was particularly so in lessons in practical subjects where students were well motivated by the teaching and by opportunities to develop creativity and skills; standards in such lessons were high. Where teaching was less effective, progress was satisfactory, particularly in some lessons seen in the core subjects in Key Stage 3. In some cases, despite classes being grouped by ability, some students made slow progress as work was not matched to their needs. Although marking has been improved since the last inspection, some remains superficial and lacks guidance on how students can improve.

Less able students have been given more focused support. This has led to improvements in external examination results among students currently in Year 11 who were entered early for these examinations. The school has strengthened its teaching of functional skills for less able and less motivated students with considerable improvements in outcomes indicated by its assessment records. Improvements to the curriculum have also helped increase the motivation of lower attaining students. Particularly attentive teaching is given to students with special educational needs and/or disabilities; this encourages their learning and interaction with their peers. The school recognises that more needs to be done to improve the achievement of lower attaining students, particularly in the core subjects.

The impact of the specialist arts status on the school has improved considerably. Arts subjects are taught by enthusiastic specialists in excellent accommodation. Improvements are clear in: the creativity of students in a wide range of media; students drawing inspiration from art forms from a diversity of cultures; a wide range of exhibitions and performances enriching the ethos of the school; and students working with adult practitioners to gain insight into professional practice and to support the school's contribution to community cohesion. Arts staff have



contributed their specialist skills to training for all staff within the school's in-service programme and to the school's curricular enrichment activities. Progress has been endorsed in the school's recent achievement of Artsmark Gold status. The school has laudable plans for continuing improvement in this area and the clear capacity to secure this.

The school has made effective use of support from a range of external sources, including the local authority. The latter has been particularly useful in helping senior leaders in their drive to improve the rigour with which teaching and learning are evaluated, and in the training and coaching provided by the authority's consultants.

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

Peter Toft
Her Majesty's Inspector