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30 June 2010

Mrs P Clarke
Headteacher
Grove Park School
Church Road
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Dear Mrs Clarke

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 16 June 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussion and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, pupils, governor, and school improvement partner who contributed.

As a result of the inspection on 18 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- use the outcomes of self-evaluation more effectively by streamlining improvement planning to prioritise the few initiatives that will have the most impact on the school's development
- extend the range of accreditation and the work-related programme in Key Stage 4 and in the post-16 department
- improve the analysis and use of assessment data to ensure that lessons consistently feature challenging learning activities to accelerate pupils' learning and that challenging targets are set.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Although there has been satisfactory progress at building the capacity for making and sustaining improvements, the progress made across the areas identified by the last inspection has been uneven. It has been affected most strongly by some variability in the quality of leadership at different levels of the school and by the work the school still has to do to ensure that all teaching, including the use of assessment, is of a consistently high quality.

The school has now settled in to its new 'co-location' format and has worked well with its host schools to provide good inclusion opportunities for its pupils, to extend the curriculum for older students, and to improve provision for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. In this, it has shown itself able to prioritise with good effect and is now well placed to embark upon a period of sustained improvement. However, some barriers to continuing and accelerated improvement still exist. Self-evaluation is not yet sufficiently spread across the whole school. Too much has rested with the headteacher in terms of trying to drive the school forward and as a result progress has been sporadic. Good use is now being made of external advisers to challenge and raise aspiration but lack of strength and cohesion across the whole senior and middle leadership group means a drive for improvement, although evident in some key areas, has yet to be shared wholeheartedly across all the staff.

The school has taken some positive steps towards creating a system that enables teachers and leaders to track pupils' progress more accurately. Targets are set which relate both to the curriculum and to individual need and these are used to broadly monitor progress and to some extent inform next steps in pupils' learning. In some parts of the school, where targets are discussed and reinforced regularly, pupils themselves are beginning to evaluate their own progress more consistently. The quality of teaching overall remains too variable; there is not enough good or outstanding teaching and some is inadequate. Lesson planning is not used consistently. At its best, it includes clearly expressed learning intentions and well-planned activities that ensure that these intentions are achieved at an individual level. Where this is linked to good recording processes this is beginning to provide evidence of improved rates of progress. However, this is not evident across the school. Day-to-day assessment of pupils' progress in lessons remains inconsistent and has not yet impacted sufficiently upon all pupils' learning and progress. As a result, pupils' achievement overall remains satisfactory.

Some effective steps have been taken to extend the curriculum for older students. A range of evidence shows that students benefit from extended opportunities for inclusion, both where the school is co-located and through work experience placements with a variety of partners. Secondary pupils benefit from access to specialist resources such as those for music, science and information and communication technology and enjoy using the sports hall and swimming pool. There is a range of lunchtime clubs at Key Stage 3 and 4, offering activities including Tao Kwan Do, art, film club and soap-making. All pupils take part in at least one club each week. Accreditation now includes the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network bronze and silver awards and the functional skills Entry Level qualifications in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. There is currently limited scope to go beyond this, due in part to the school's distance from alternative providers and some funding constraints. Pupils in Years 12 to 14 are supported effectively by school staff and by a Connexions adviser in moving to the next stage of training or education when they leave the school.

Support provided by the local authority has mainly been through the provision of a School Improvement Partner. The school is now benefiting from the support and challenge provided by a recently appointed improvement partner who is a very experienced headteacher.

Pupils clearly like coming to school and are positive about what they are able to do. Many of them particularly enjoy the opportunities to mix with pupils from their co-located school and college and the extended facilities that co-location provides. Key Stage 4 pupils are particularly and rightly proud of the First Prize that their garden won at the South of England show.

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

Anne Duffy
Her Majesty's Inspector