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24 February 2010

Mr Richard Preece
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Dear Mr Preece

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 February, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, colleagues and governor who contributed.

There have been a number of changes since the previous inspection. Most notable of these has been the appointment of a new headteacher in September 2008 and the subsequent creation of a new senior leadership team.

As a result of the inspection on 5 March 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve the clarity, balance and accountability of the senior management roles
- ensure assessment better informs target setting and teaching and learning
- improve progress in English for students aged 11 to 14 years
- improve attendance further.

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

The attainment of pupils on entry and when they leave school is generally below that of children of similar ages. The school is right in judging that pupils make satisfactory progress currently although there are indications that this is improving. The school is aware that more pupils in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4 reach or exceed their targets but increasingly careful analysis is being used to ensure that variations between groups are minimised. Achievement is satisfactory and pupils



demonstrate increased confidence and improved attitudes to learning as they progress through the school.

The headteacher has created a strong senior leadership team which has had evident impact upon many aspects of the school's development. Senior leaders have a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are taking rigorous action to secure improvement. Governors hold senior staff to account with increased rigour and all members of the senior leadership team are clear about the direction in which they are taking the school. Staff and pupils alike value this clarity and know what is expected of them.

Target setting is increasingly precise and linked closely to National Curriculum levels. This has enabled senior leaders to track progress more accurately and identify more securely which pupils are making good or outstanding progress and any that are underachieving. Targets are scrutinised and monitored by senior leaders and good use is made of moderation to ensure that staff are increasingly involved in the process of setting targets. Staff training has been used well to coach staff in assessment strategies and they are making greater use of assessment information to inform and evaluate their teaching. Pupils' individual learning needs are known and planned for with increasing accuracy although this is not yet consistent in all classes. Where teaching assistants are used most effectively, they play an active part in delivering lessons which are pitched at the right level for each learner. Sometimes, however, they are underused, particularly in group sessions. Pupils respond well to opportunities to evaluate their own progress and many have a clear idea of the level at which they are working and what they should be aiming for. When encouraged to do so, they enjoy discussing their own and each other's work in order to see how it could be improved.

The focus on pupils' progress has meant that there is now less variation in attainment across different subjects. Although the school knows that there is more to be done to ensure that pupils make as much progress as they can in every subject, English at Key Stage 3 no longer stands out as an isolated issue. A whole-school approach to reading has had evident impact. Good use has been made of inclusion opportunities with the neighbouring secondary school to support individual progress in English up to GCSE level in certain cases.

A programme of observations has been used well to raise the quality of teaching across the school and pupils say that lessons have become more interesting and there is much less disruption. A clear and consistent approach to behaviour management has reduced the number of incidents and exclusions. Pupils respond well to positive alternatives, such as the use of the 'blue room', if they are finding it difficult to remain in class. As a result of these and other strategies, attendance has improved year on year. In 2008/9 it was average and figures to date show above average attendance for this school year.

Very effective self-evaluation is helping the school to move forward in many aspects and at every level. It works well with the local authority which has provided well-targeted support at crucial points in the school's development. The headteacher, along with other staff members and governors, has built demonstrable capacity for further improvement and all concerned are ambitious for the school's future. As one pupil so succinctly put it, 'This is definitely a school that's getting better but it could still do more.'

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