

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Mr C Leach
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Leach

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on Wednesday 25 November 2009, and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Would you also pass on our thanks to all of the pupils and students who helped to make our time with you so enjoyable and interesting.

Since the previous inspection, the percentage of pupils entering the school at Year 7 with special educational needs and/or disabilities has increased. As a result standards on entry have dipped.

As a result of the inspection on 16 and 17 January 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure that safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet government requirements
- improve the consistency of teaching and learning in line with the school's best practice to ensure that all students make good progress, especially in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form
- develop, in collaboration with partners, more flexible post-16 provision to meet the needs of students to ensure effective 14–19 progression
- improve communication with parents to involve them more closely in the work of 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.

The school's current data, along with evidence from summer 2009, shows that attainment is average and progress is satisfactory overall. At Key Stage 3, pupils

make good progress in mathematics, science, humanities and the school's specialist areas of performing arts, but only satisfactory progress in English. At Key Stage 4, standards are average overall. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, progress has been good, although inconsistencies have resulted in satisfactory progress in other subjects and this is restricting pupils' overall progress. These strengths and weaknesses are reflected in the improvement in the number of pupils achieving five or more A*–C GCSEs including English and mathematics, contrasted with the disappointing number achieving five or more A*–C grades without English and mathematics. In the sixth form, attainment is average and progress is satisfactory.

The school's safeguarding procedures are now secure, reflect good practice and demonstrate that all statutory requirements are being met. All staff are up to date with training in child protection procedures.

The school's leaders judge the quality of teaching to be improving. The evidence collected during the visit supports this judgement. The leadership team has a realistic view of the quality of teaching in the school and is aware of where there are strengths and areas for improvement. Pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form confirmed that there have been improvements since the inspection, although the opportunities for discussions are variable between subjects. The school is working effectively to increase the number of lessons that are at least good. In the better lessons, teachers share learning objectives with pupils and show a good awareness of the different abilities of the pupils in the class so that their needs are increasingly well met. However, the degree to which work is tailored to pupils' individual needs varies between subjects. The school has now established systems such as workshops, where the most effective teaching methods are disseminated amongst staff.

Increasing flexibility within the curriculum, through the introduction of cross-curricular themed weeks on issues such as globalisation and sustainability and healthy lifestyles, has encouraged staff and pupils to make links in learning between subjects to promote more continuity and sharing of good practice. The 'super learning days' have led to pupils being taught in mixed-age groups across the whole range of year groups, including sixth form, providing all pupils and students with cross-curricular learning opportunities. At Key Stage 4 there is an increasing number of courses to complement GCSEs. These include BTEC, ASDAN awards and Young Apprenticeships. In the sixth form, the school currently provides Level 3 qualifications at A and AS level. However, pupils are now able to access Level 1 and 2 courses through collaborative partnerships with other schools and local colleges. The school is aware of the changing abilities and needs of pupils and constantly reviews the curriculum and qualifications provided. This demonstrates that the school is providing increasingly relevant progression routes for all pupils and students.

The school's liaison with parents has improved well since the time of the last inspection. Parents are kept informed through regular events such as information evenings, parents' evenings and regular newsletters. The school regularly solicits parents' views and these show an increasing confidence in the work of the school.

The school's performing arts specialism performs well and pupils make good progress overall. The school is using the creativity developed in the performing arts to develop a wider range of teaching strategies in other areas of the curriculum.

Awareness of the school's performance by senior leaders, recent curricular changes and evidence of rising standards in the core subjects at both key stages show that the school is demonstrating a better capacity to improve than at the time of the last inspection. Effective support has been provided by the local authority, through the provision of consultants, to support teaching and learning, especially in English and mathematics, and to build capacity at all levels of the school's management.

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

David Muir
Her Majesty's Inspector