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Dr Tony Rickwood
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Dear Dr Rickwood

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Mary Liptrot on 4 March 2010, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the students for taking the time to talk to us and share their work.

Since the time of the last inspection, staffing has been relative stable with only a few staff changes in the core subjects. These include a new role for the former head of mathematics with a new head of this faculty being externally appointed and a middle leader in English who is currently on secondment with Education Bradford. One of the senior leadership team has taken on a new whole-school quality assurance role as part of her responsibilities.

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

- increase further the amount of good and better teaching across the school to ensure high standards in all subjects
- embed the process for target setting and monitoring students' progress in Key Stage 4 so that students know how they are doing and what they need to do to improve
- ensure that strategies to raise achievement are implemented consistently and monitored rigorously at middle management level.



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.

Students' attainment has risen since the time of the last inspection, as a result of improvements to the quality of teaching, more effective use of assessment data and curricular developments. The number of students gaining 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE for example, has improved from significantly below to significantly above the national average. Progress in improving attainment in GCSE English and mathematics has been more variable with an unanticipated dip in results in 2008. However, this decline has been robustly addressed and consequently GCSE results in 2009 confirm that students' attainment in these subjects has also improved to be broadly in line with the national average. More significantly, the school's predictions in 2009 were much closer to actual outcomes because the accuracy of assessment has increased and the tracking of students' progress is more rigorous. Students continue to achieve well in the specialist subjects. Rising attainment is reflected in contextualised value added measures. These show that overall, students are now making the expected level of progress relative to their starting points. In lessons seen during the inspection the majority of students displayed positive attitudes to learning and were able to work independently, individually and in small groups. In a small minority of lessons where teaching observed was less effective, students' attention on learning diminished and this limited their progress. Much work has been done to ensure that targets are used more effectively to help students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. As a result, the vast majority of students are aware of their current attainment and many could explain what they needed to do to improve their work. However, students did identify that there is still considerable variation in the effectiveness of written and verbal feedback between teachers in some faculties and also between subjects. A view confirmed by inspectors during observations and from work scrutiny.

The school has used a variety of approaches to increase the proportion of good or better teaching including whole staff and small group training sessions using internal and external expertise, coaching for individual teachers and increasing opportunities to share good practice both within and between departments. For example, the influence of the specialist subjects has been effective in boosting teachers' confidence in the use of more creative approaches to enhance their teaching and to enrich students' learning experience. Systems to monitor the embedding of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning are becoming increasingly well developed. Consequently, both senior and middle leaders have a better overview of the current strengths and weaknesses in teaching. However, documents used to support this process require further refinement to ensure an appropriate balance between evaluating the quality of learning and the quality of teaching. The consideration of external criteria also needs to be incorporated to allow the school to benchmark its judgements about the quality of students' outcomes and provision more accurately.

Accountability for both class teachers and curriculum area leaders to secure improved attainment has increased, but staff feel this has been appropriately balanced with increased levels of support by senior leaders. Communication within the school between class teachers, faculty leaders, pastoral leaders and the senior team has improved and is supporting increased consistency in provision and a greater focus on securing the best outcomes for students. Discussions relating to the performance of individual students and identified groups are more frequent and as a result, students' underperformance is being identified and tackled more swiftly. The range of intervention strategies to help students get back on track has been widened and targeted action, such as one-to-one tuition, mentoring and regrouping of students is contributing to rising attainment. However, the school recognises that there is still a need to further refine the use of targets to raise attainment.

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

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector