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Mr Tomes
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tomes

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 May 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass my thanks on to the students, staff and governors who gave up their time to speak to me and to your personal assistant who helped the day run smoothly.

Since the previous inspection, the principal has taken up another post elsewhere and there has been an acting principal since March 2009. The current school roll although smaller than at the time of the last inspection has stabilised and shows some indications of increasing. There are also fewer members of staff.

As a result of the inspection on 11 and 12 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- accelerate the rate of improvement in students' standards and achievement by increasing the proportion of good teaching
- strengthen the curriculum, particularly in relation to its technology specialism
- develop the understanding, interpretation and use of assessment data to inform refined planning and focused intervention for all students.

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.



Although standards overall are below average, the proportion of students achieving higher levels of GCSEs has steadily increased since 2007. Students' work seen during lessons and the school's assessment information indicate that the current Years 10 and 11 students are making satisfactory progress and on track to at least meet agreed targets. There are small numbers of students whose progress has been slower than expected and the intervention strategies the school has recently put in place are beginning to pay off. As a result, more of the potentially underachieving students are making satisfactory progress towards achieving better GCSE results at the end of Year 11. Those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making satisfactory progress. The behaviour of students in classes and around the school is good.

There is an increasing proportion of good teaching, but the amount of satisfactory teaching is still too high. Effective teaching has clear learning outcomes, practical and well-structured activities which meet the students' learning needs and abilities enabling them to make good progress. These lessons are well informed by what the teachers know about students' prior learning and this knowledge is used during the lessons to adapt the activities to ensure students are challenged. In lessons where teaching is less effective, although lesson plans are consistent in their format, the activities do not meet the different students' abilities. As a result, progress overall slows down and, in a few cases, students lose interest and motivation. The marking of students' work is inconsistent both within and across subjects. The good examples are regularly marked and provide students with clear areas for improvement and targets. However, there are many books where marking is sporadic and perfunctory. Students commented on the difference in the quality of marking between subjects and teachers and this has led to dissatisfaction and slower progress.

The college's work on developing the curriculum since the last inspection has been generally effective. The school has worked hard to ensure its specialist technology status has had impact across the school. Included in the range of effective activities has been discreet technology weeks and technology enterprise days, an upgrading of computer rooms and equipment. The food technology department is one of the areas that has been particularly well developed and is popular with many students. The school has developed an effective, collaborative approach with local schools and colleges which has enabled a wider range of subjects to be accessed successfully by students of all abilities.

The acting principal and senior leadership team know the school and students well. There have been some challenges for the team to face, which have on occasions drawn their attention away from the key priorities. Recently, there has been a renewed vigour to focus on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning through more rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Robust and formal action has been taken where the quality of teaching has been too slow to respond to support and training. The school has good systems in place for tracking students' progress and attainment, providing clear information regarding students' progress over time.

The governing body is businesslike and is able to carry out its statutory duties. In recent years, there have been some challenging circumstances which have caused distractions. However, they are able to hold the school to account and aware of what the school needs to do next to improve.

The local authority has provided satisfactory support to the school with regard to supporting leaders and managers in working to improve the quality of teaching and learning through visits from consultants and strategy managers.

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

John Seal
Her Majesty's Inspector