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Mrs J Hazeldine
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hazeldine

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: the impact that links between parents/carers and schools have on supporting and encouraging young people's achievement, well-being and personal development

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, parents, governors and students, during my visit on 26 November 2009.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on how the school's work with parents and carers affects a range of outcomes for students.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff, governors, parents and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; observation of the school at work; and attendance at part of a Year 11 parents' evening.

The overall effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers is satisfactory.

The impact of parental involvement on outcomes

The impact of parental involvement on outcomes is satisfactory.

- Parents of those students who demonstrate behavioural or social needs strongly appreciate recent notable improvements in the way the school works with them. Records for individual students are thorough. Contacts with, and contributions from, parents are valued and recorded

meticulously. The integration of pastoral, house and learning support systems has improved and now leads to proactive work. Staff engage with parents quickly, information is shared appropriately and any difficulties are worked on in consultation. As a consequence, the rate of exclusions has fallen.

- The school has begun to celebrate, very overtly, all types of achievement with students and parents. This is creating a culture that is focused more on outcomes and success which, in turn, is leading to higher expectations among many parents and students.
- Several parents have clear knowledge of the school's recent good curriculum changes and its new and successful Behaviour for Learning policy. Some, but not all, also understand the methods of learning and revision preferred by the school. A recent evening for Year 11 parents on 'revision skills' was received well by many.
- Recent improvements, in the way in which attendance is managed and issues are shared with parents, have contributed to a reduction in absence, including persistent absence. Attendance rates are satisfactory and improving.

The impact of the involvement of parents on the quality of provision

The impact of the involvement of parents on the quality of provision is satisfactory.

- There are very few opportunities for parents to contribute directly to the school's work and its curriculum. The school has yet to establish a systematic approach to this. Similarly, although parents are consulted carefully on decisions such as changes to uniform or school day times, this is less effective for policy issues relating directly to the curriculum and learning. However, the school is using its sports specialism effectively to engage some parents and the community in events outside the school day.
- There is no parent-teacher association or similar organisation. However, there are moves afoot, led by staff, to establish one, with an initial promising response from some parents.
- You have improved several communication channels with parents. These include an informative and easily navigable website, a well-produced prospectus and parents' handbook, along with a glossy and informative termly news magazine.
- Parents say the school is becoming much more responsive to individual parental concerns or requests for information. Staff respond quickly and helpfully and are ready to work in partnership.
- Students like the letters of praise that are sent home to parents, as well as the planners which are used increasingly well as a link between staff and parents. These promote helpful discussion of school work at home.
- Parents are not yet involved significantly in the process of setting students' academic targets. They are, however, now given several useful

opportunities to be informed about them through annual parents' evenings and documents sent home. The parents' evening observed was a positive, well-focused event. However, a minority of parents do not attend such occasions.

The impact of the involvement of parents on inclusion

The impact of the involvement of parents on inclusion is satisfactory.

- The school's close engagement with parents is targeted principally at those with students most at risk, including the small number who are looked after. Parents and carers say that the school does a great deal for them. You recognise that there is more to do to extend such engagement to a wider range of families.

The impact of leadership and management on the involvement of parents

The impact of leadership and management on the involvement of parents is satisfactory.

- You have a clear, deep understanding of the importance of working closely with parents. Consequently, with great commitment, you have led the many improvements the school has made in this area in recent years. Staff, governors, parents and students, rightly, respect highly what you have achieved so far from a low base. Senior staff are now taking on significant responsibility for this work, giving greater capacity for further needed improvements.
- Your evaluation of the school's work with parents is accurate.
- The governing body values the role of parents in school life but has not been proactive in this area.
- You deal with parental complaints appropriately and in a non-defensive style, valuing the time and effort parents have taken to contact the school. The complaints policy is clear and accessible.
- The school's website is clear about the value placed on parents' work with the school. However, there is no overall policy or agreed statement about it.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- exploring ways of using the expertise of parents and carers to improve the curriculum and raise standards
- consulting more widely with parents on policy development, especially in matters relating to the curriculum and learning
- building further on the successful work already done to enable many parents to understand better the school's methods and policies and how they can support their daughters' learning
- encouraging higher attendance at parents' evenings.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the impact of the work of parents and carers in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector