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Mrs N Davis  
Headteacher  
Aldersley High School  
Barnhurst Lane  
Codsall  
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Dear Mrs Davis

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 May 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to your chair of governors, local authority representative, staff and students who gave up their time to talk to me.

At the time of the last inspection, you had only been in post for one month. Since that time, two members of staff have left the school and two have arrived.

As a result of the inspection on 14–15 October 2009, the school was asked to focus on two key issues. Firstly, to raise achievement across the school by:

- improving the quality of teaching and students' independent learning skills;
- improving attendance and reducing the number of persistent absentees;
- improving monitoring and evaluation systems across the school to ensure that the school could clearly identify its strengths and act on its weaknesses so that student outcomes improve.

The second key issue focused on improving outcomes in the sixth form:

- to make sure that sixth form students improved their literacy and other basic skills;
- to ensure they developed their personal study skills so that they were less reliant on the teacher;
- to make sure that the sixth form curriculum met the needs of all students.

This monitoring visit considered how the school had improved since the October 2009 inspection. HMI observed 15 lessons jointly with the headteacher, talked to a



range of staff concerning the above issues, and spoke to a range of students and governors. The arrangement for the safeguarding of students were also checked and found to be robust as at the last inspection.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

Since the October 2009 inspection, school monitoring data clearly shows that standards in English and mathematics are improving. An early entry policy has ensured that 37% of Year 11 students have already attained English and mathematics GCSE at grade C or above. Data tracking by the school indicates that this is expected to rise to 45% following the summer 2010 examinations, much closer to the national average of around 50%. This represents a big improvement on the 31% attained in the 2009 exams. This is due, in part, to the high focus leaders and managers at all levels have had on improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning. Training has been provided for subject leaders to help them observe lessons with another colleague and engage in discussion about good practice. In the large number of lessons visited jointly with the headteacher during this monitoring inspection, there is now clear evidence that teaching is more consistent across the school and challenges students to improve their target grades. School monitoring data confirms that the quality of teaching has improved and now 60% is judged to be good or better compared with 40% at the last inspection. However, some weaknesses still remain in the clarity of learning objectives in teachers' planning. In the less successful lessons, students are still not involved enough in the lessons and teachers still talk too much at the expense of asking challenging and probing questions. Leaders and managers at all levels are now more aware of the support that individual teachers need to improve their teaching to that of the best and are providing appropriate support. There have been three whole-school staff training days with a focus on independent learning since the last inspection and this has resulted in a growing staff awareness of how to engage students more. There is now more evidence of students engaging in independent learning activities, both in the lessons and for homework tasks. Year 10 and 11 students recognise that there are now more opportunities for paired and group work in lessons. One commented that independent learning, 'is helping me to learn more and remember more'.

Attendance has improved significantly from 90.1% in October 2009 to 92.1% at this visit, much closer to the national average of 92.7%. The number of persistent absentees has reduced from 58 to 22 students. This is due to the much higher profile that attendance has had with all staff, students and their parents, and with the focused support from the attendance officers. The biggest reason for poor attendance is condoned absence by parents. Much persistent absence was due to the fact that students were previously unaware of the impact that frequent absence was having on their attainment.



The strong leadership of the headteacher, with support from a reorganised and energised senior management team, has ensured that monitoring systems to identify and act on the school's strengths and weaknesses have improved at all management levels. New interventions or actions are now clearly planned and evaluated for the significance of their impact on improving outcomes. Individual members of the senior team are held accountable and report back to the headteacher and governors. They are now required to be able to demonstrate the impact of their actions on student attainment.

New sixth form senior management responsibilities have ensured more rigorous and regular monitoring systems are now in place. For example, there is now a higher expectation of improving teaching quality from good to outstanding. Sixth form data also suggests that outcomes are improving and students' literacy and other basic skills are a stronger feature of the curriculum provision. Students now report that they are well supported with their work at school and at home and know how they can improve. During the visit, a number of students were seen engaging well in independent research work to support their Health and Social Care projects. Discussion with students also showed that they are much less reliant on the teacher doing all the work for them and could explain how they have independently researched topics and found out information for themselves. Developing their literacy skills is a key focus for tutor time, for example spelling tests; and newspapers are now provided for students in the common room. The more rigorous Year 11 discussions and clearer entry requirements into the sixth form have ensured that students are now much better guided towards appropriate courses to study, either at the school or in other local schools as part of the well co-ordinated consortium arrangements. Students report that they were well informed about the courses they are studying and feel confident to discuss any issues with staff. A small minority of students had successfully changed courses to better meet their needs. The consortium arrangements with three other local schools ensures there is a wide and expanding range of Level 1, 2 and 3 courses available.

The school was reviewing its specialist technology college status at the last inspection and this remains the case. Although science is attaining high standards, the other specialist subjects of mathematics and design technology are currently not having sufficient impact on improving whole-school attainment. External support from the local authority (LA) has started to improve provision in design technology.

The LA statement of action records its proposed support for the school and the statement is fit for purpose. The LA has provided good support for the school. Consultant support in the core subjects and for improving teaching and learning has been particularly successful.

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



Clive Kempton HMI  
Her Majesty's Inspector

