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Mr Jeff Brindle
Principal
Clacton County High School
Walton Road
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Dear Mr Brindle

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 5 May 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit.

Following the last inspection in November 2009, the school lodged a formal complaint with Ofsted. The report, published in March 2010, was only recently shared with students and parents. The local authority statement of action was also published in March 2010. Currently, the school is fully staffed. Three members of the senior leadership team have indicated they will leave the school at the end of the summer term. A check of the single central record and safeguarding procedures by HMI confirmed that all arrangements remain secure.

As a result of the inspection on 18-19 November 2009, the school was asked to:

- improve the provision and outcomes for students with special educational needs, particularly those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
- develop and apply a rewards and sanctions policy that is perceived as fair by students, staff and parents
- raise attendance to at least 92%
- improve the quality of teaching
- raise attainment in mathematics.

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

Senior leaders have made important changes to school policy and amended development plans to secure long-term improvements. The principal and governors show the drive and determination to fully resolve the issues facing the school at the earliest opportunity. A number of effective teachers and managers linked to the school's specialisms continue, as part of the 'quality of learning' team, to make an important contribution to improving teaching and learning across the school.

Additional staff training and regular lesson monitoring are improving the quality of teaching of mathematics. Observations of four-part lessons found that a better balance between the time students spent listening to teachers, and working together in pairs and small groups is aiding their progress. Students are actively involved in their learning, memorising and then sharing key facts or explaining specific subject language to others. A scrutiny of students' work shows a wider variety of methods to reinforce their understanding. Detailed explanations and regular praise from teachers are boosting students' confidence and competence. More consistent teaching and increased support for targeted groups of students are promoting achievement. Seventy Year 11 students have already attained at least a grade C in GCSE mathematics earlier this year and the school anticipates that more than half of all Year 11 students will attain an A* to C grade.

More rigorous procedures to monitor the overall quality of teaching are providing senior leaders with a much clearer picture of where the strengths and weaknesses lie and where to target support towards those teachers who need it most. Sample lesson observations by HMI confirmed the school's own view that the overall quality of teaching is improving but remains variable. Improved marking provides advice to students but does not refer to target grades. Time is allocated for students to work independently and think for themselves but seating arrangements in some classrooms restrict opportunities for them to learn in groups.

Tailoring lessons to meet the full range of students' learning needs remains a common weakness in the majority of teaching observed. Teachers collate assessment data and know which students have learning or behavioural difficulties, but this knowledge does not translate into lesson plans to meet all of their learning needs. Classes with both more-able students and students with learning difficulties are often taught the same lesson content. Consequently, tasks are too difficult for some and they lose interest in what they are doing. The school is poised to implement two key improvements. A recent review of how learning support staff are deployed in lessons has provided clear guidance on how to use them much more effectively. In addition, individual education plans for students with learning needs and with behavioural difficulties have been amalgamated into a single student information sheet containing the key information teachers need to plan to meet their particular needs.

During the monitoring visit, the majority of students behaved themselves in lessons and during lunchtime. Some low-level disruption by a minority of younger students was noted at lesson changeover time and in one lesson observation. HMI also noted

a degree of passivity amongst some students who prefer to let others answer questions and contribute to discussions. The proportion of students excluded from school has fallen from 6.5% to 3.9% and fewer students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have been excluded since the start of this year. The proportion referred to the on-site exclusion unit has fallen but the number of referrals indicates that behaviour is not yet fully secure. A revised behaviour policy with an escalating system of rewards and sanctions is planned for implementation this term. It has been shared with students and is to be viewed shortly by parents to gain their full agreement.

Persistent absence rates have fallen to below the target set by the local authority but they remain marginally above the national average. Two additional support workers form part of a raft of strategies to boost overall attendance, but the target of 92% remains an elusive one. The current rate of 91.5% masks significant differences in the attendance of each year group. For example, on the day of the monitoring visit attendance ranged from over 93% in Year 9 to 87% in Year 11. This remains a concern because the progress being made in raising achievement and improving outcomes will have little impact on those Year 11 students who do not regularly attend. Senior leaders and the local authority are both committed to meeting the target set.

External support from the local authority is satisfactory. Senior leaders welcome the help in brokering consultancy and value the support and challenge provided by the school improvement partner (SIP). The SIP is due to change later this term. The statement of action includes appropriate timescales and specific targets for improvement.

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 Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector