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1 October 2010

Mrs V Angus  
Headteacher  
Reading Girls' School  
Northumberland Avenue  
Reading  
Berkshire  
RG2 7PY

Dear Mrs Angus

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Reading Girls' School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 September 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the executive headteacher, your students, staff and the governor who gave me a good insight into life in the school.

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing. The acting headteacher has been appointed to the substantive post. In addition, a new deputy headteacher, faculty leaders in the core subjects and several teachers have been appointed. The school's federation with Kendrick School has acquired trust status. A new post-16 centre, focusing mainly on vocational learning, has opened in collaboration with Reading College. The school has joined the Partnership in Excellence (PiXL) scheme.

As a result of the inspection on 8–9 October 2008, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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.



In 2009 attainment fell below the national averages and achievement for most students, White British girls in particular, was inadequate. This was mostly due to the instability in staffing identified in the last report. The school has made good progress in recruiting and retaining staff and is now entering its second year with a full complement of permanent teaching staff. This, together with curriculum changes and improved tracking of student progress using systems adopted from the PiXL scheme have resulted in a significant rise in attainment in 2010, closing the gap in most areas between the school and national averages. For example, the proportion of students gaining 5 or more A\* to C grades rose from 47% to 75%, in English A\* to C grades rose from 50% to 67% and in science from 27% to 78%. For most students this represented satisfactory progress with a minority making good progress in some subjects. However, mathematics, one of the specialist subjects, remained below the national average with inadequate progress. The school has identified that, while interventions were put in place to improve achievement in mathematics, these were not sufficiently reviewed and adjusted as they were in English. This is being addressed effectively for the current Year 11. Current school data suggest that the impact of stability in staffing is filtering down the school so that students' progress, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is beginning to accelerate.

Lesson observations and comments from students show that there is now a very positive learning culture across the school. While some students do make good progress, for most it is satisfactory. Teaching overall remains satisfactory because good practices are not consistent across the school. Lessons are often too teacher-led so that pace slows and students do not become sufficiently involved or active in their learning. Learning accelerates when students are challenged and provided with good opportunities to be involved in whole-class, small group or paired discussion work, enabling them to develop both independence and self-confidence in the subject being taught. Teachers are now focusing more on what students are learning through clear lesson objectives but these are not always consistently used to review progress through the lesson.

Assessment for tracking purposes has improved so that the school has an accurate picture of current performance. In some subjects, for example English and geography, students receive effective comments on how to improve their work. However, this good practice is not consistent across the school. Similarly, assessment criteria are not always actively shared and used in lessons to help students understand what they need to do and how to raise their achievement. Students speak positively about the new personal tracking system and feel this is helping to improve their achievement.

To improve the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation the school has put in place biannual subject reviews by senior leaders within the school, the local authority and the federation. However, while these yield useful information about the strengths and areas for development within a subject, they are not always flexible enough to bring about improvement in the short term. The school

development plan is very appropriately focused on raising achievement for all students, although it is both long and detailed, making ownership for those who are responsible for actions difficult and so slowing the rate of improvement. When leaders have highly focused plans significant improvement can be seen. For example, attendance has risen to the national level with persistent absence reduced to below that found nationally.

The capacity of leaders and managers to promote sustained improvement is better than at the time of the previous inspection. The school has embraced a wide range of support from both local authority consultants and staff from Kendrick School, which includes the executive headteacher. This has been instrumental in helping the school to move forward. The new headteacher is providing clear vision and direction to the school to raise student achievement. She has strengthened and distributed leadership at both senior and middle level, so that leaders are increasingly being held to account for student outcomes in their areas of responsibility. Leaders at all levels are moving the focus from raising attainment to the individual progress being made by students. Class teachers are making more use of data in planning lessons, although accountability for student performance at this level is in the early stages of development. While recruitment procedures are in line with government requirements, the Single Central Record required some minor amendments prior to inspectors leaving the school.

The business and enterprise specialism is beginning to embed itself across the school. However, its current impact is limited because it has yet to become a driver for improvement. When business and enterprise activities are incorporated into the curriculum, such as in French or English, lessons are livelier and student enjoyment and progress increases.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2008

- Review strategies for the recruitment and retention of teachers to ensure greater continuity of staffing.
- Ensure all teachers implement consistently the agreed procedures for assessing students' performance, so that they know how to improve.
- Ensure that the findings of the school's monitoring and evaluation of performance are used effectively to drive improvement.