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Mr Robert Sheffield
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sheffield

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Susan Williams and Lucie Callow, Additional Inspectors, on 29 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 students who gave up their lunch break to speak to us.

During the last academic year there have been changes to the senior leadership team and several long-term absences among this group of key staff. As a result improvements have proved slower to implement than was hoped. The local authority has provided additional support to the leadership team.

As a result of the inspection on 10–11 June 2009, 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.

Since the inspection, the proportion of students gaining five good passes in GCSE examinations has continued to increase. The proportion gaining five good passes including English and mathematics has increased by 10% in two years, but remains below the national average. There has been a marked improvement in English attainment, but mathematics results have not shown a similar improvement. Some of this improvement is due to improved teaching in subjects such as English and some is down to targeted intervention strategies, as the quality of teaching has not yet improved sufficiently across all subjects. Despite the improvements in attainment, the progress of students remains only satisfactory because it varies too



much between subjects and between teachers. The differences in attainment and progress reflected by the examination results were clearly seen when touring the school and through lesson observations.

The school's specialist subjects in the technology area continue to be popular and successful. Students told inspectors how they enjoy these subjects because they are able to do things rather than 'just sit and listen'.

During the monitoring visit a range of teaching was seen across the school. This, together with discussion with students, confirmed that the quality of teaching is variable and much remains satisfactory. In lessons some impact of professional development in teaching and learning could clearly be seen. Clear learning objectives characterised most but not all lesson plans. However, while groups are often identified on plans, lessons are rarely adapted to meet the needs and interests of different learners. Too often the concept of planning to challenge more-able learners comprised statements such as more-able students will find more challenging tasks easier. Behaviour in lessons is generally good, as are the relationships between staff and students. In less effective lessons students become bored and disengaged as the additional professional development for teachers has not yet had sufficient impact in the classroom. Students often find the work too easy or are unclear as to what they are supposed to do because teachers are not yet skilled enough in checking students' understanding. In some lessons mini whiteboards are used to check learning effectively. However, in many lessons teachers talk for too long, broken by perhaps a few questions to a few students with hands up. Questions are not targeted and students can too easily hide and avoid participating in the lesson.

The curriculum has been developed to include a wider range of vocational and applied courses but students see the difference as being about assessment styles rather than teaching and learning styles. Teachers have not yet been trained in how to adapt their approach for these courses.

A new marking policy has been developed, but its use is variable. Where it is used, students are positive and find it helps them to improve their work. In other cases, however, although only a few pieces of work had been completed at this stage of term, none had been marked to help students gauge their early progress.

A whole-school approach to develop the literacy skills of students is slowly evolving. The school worked hard to appoint an appropriately skilled and experienced literacy coordinator following the inspection. However, the post was not filled until the summer term. While action in this area was slow to get going, good plans are now in place, which are being implemented this term, but it is too soon to see their impact.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The headteacher's analysis of teaching and learning as he toured the school with the lead inspector was accurate and perceptive. Leaders have good plans and have established good systems for improving the monitoring of student progress and

to hold teachers accountable. However, after a year of planning, these systems are just beginning their implementation and so, in this area also, it is too soon to see impact.

More positively, successful partnership with the local authority and the school's own positive actions have resulted in the school no longer being categorised as having a persistent absence problem. Attendance is now at the school's target of 93%, which is above average for secondary schools. Improved links with parents and the use of robust enforcement procedures together with a more attractive curriculum have brought about this good 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

Adrian Lyons

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2009

- Raise standards and achievement, particularly for boys in English and higher-attaining students.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers' planning challenges all students and accelerates their progress.
- Develop a robust approach to embedding the development of students' literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Ensure that senior leaders are robust and consistent in monitoring and evaluating, and hence improving, the work of the school.