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Mr R V Worthington
St Michael's Church of England High School
Throne Road
Rowley Regis
West Midlands
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Dear Mr Worthington

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Michael's Church of England High School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 January 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and students.

Since the last inspection three members of staff have joined the senior leadership team and there are new heads of department in English, mathematics and art. Three new teachers have joined the mathematics department. Two senior education specialists have joined the governing body.

As a result of the inspection on 23 and 24 September 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 both in making improvements and in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment is low. In 2010, 48% of students achieved five GCSE A* to C grades. This was lower than in 2009. Consequently, the school has acted with a greater determination to improve results for all students in every subject. Progress in mathematics has been slow to improve; only 33% of students achieved their targets in 2010. This is compared with 56% in English. Issues leading to poor learning and understanding previously in mathematics have been correctly identified and addressed by the school. Students have continued to be successful in science and modern foreign languages. The school has introduced systems to track students' performance regularly in all subjects. This information is shared with staff, parents and students, twice termly. All students' targets are now appropriately challenging.

September 2010



Any student not meeting their targets is quickly identified and tailored support is provided. Students who have succeeded in English, but are behind in mathematics, have been identified by the school. Support has been put in place to help these students achieve grade C or above in mathematics. Mentors support students who are at risk of falling behind, providing fortnightly tutoring. The school is confident it has in place the staff and strategies to meet its challenging targets.

Students' progress in lessons is at least satisfactory. All staff plan their lessons effectively to meet a range of learners' needs. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of what their students can achieve. Staff regularly employ strategies which take a greater account of students' learning styles. For example, students work in pairs and groups more frequently. Students also have a better understanding of the examination grade criteria which they apply to their work. In the best lessons, students confidently discuss how to use grade criteria to make improvements. Students' work is frequently marked and staff follow the new marking policy. As a result, written feedback is given to students, but does not always explain how work can be improved. Generally, students have the opportunity to apply any advice they are given through marking to their next piece of work. Students are encouraged and helped to reach challenging targets. For example, regular checks are made on students' learning during lessons. Students are asked to explain their thinking in lessons and, as a result, teachers adapt learning activities to take account of any misunderstandings. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson, students enjoyed working out the 'mean' stamina for their fantasy football team. Learning moved at a good pace and students were able to apply their knowledge to other areas of mathematics.

The school's teaching and learning group have been instrumental in placing teaching and learning at the top of the agenda for staff. Consequently, staff have begun to share their good practice. Staff now have a wider repertoire of strategies to encourage students to think and talk about their learning. The school is working effectively with a partner high school and the local authority to provide coaching and support to help teachers develop their own practice.

Behaviour around the school is good and sets a positive tone for learning. Students behave with maturity and consideration towards each other, listening to and valuing each others' opinions. Attendance has improved and is now in line with national expectations for secondary schools. The school has been successful in greatly reducing the number of lessons being missed.

Leaders and managers at all levels are working resolutely to improve teaching and learning. The leadership team have successfully improved the school's capacity for sustained improvement through embedding a wide range of initiatives. As a result, the effectiveness of senior and middle managers to monitor and improve teaching and learning has increased. There is a well-thought-out schedule for monitoring the quality of learning in lessons. Monitoring findings are analysed and shared to help teachers develop their expertise. Consequently, both middle managers and teachers

are held to account for improving learning. The school has a shared understanding of what good teaching and learning looks like. The school uses student performance data effectively to transform learning in the classroom. Professional development is systematically provided for all staff and is clearly linked to improving teaching and learning.

The management of the school's specialism in business and enterprise has been used to improve the curriculum through greater opportunities for students to undertake work related studies. These curriculum developments have encouraged a greater proportion of students to study post-16.

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to be consistently good by ensuring that:
 - assessment information is used consistently to plan lessons and to make sure that teaching and learning activities are well matched to students' ability and will stretch and extend their knowledge and skills
 - regular and thorough checks are made on students' understanding during lessons in order to maintain challenging and effective learning
 - marking is of consistently high quality, includes constructive feedback to students on how to improve their work, and requires action by students
 - teachers use a broader and more interesting range of strategies tailored to meet the needs of each student and to increase the level of participation in learning activities by students
 - regular monitoring of classroom practice focuses on evaluating the quality of students' learning and progress.