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Friday 15 October 2010

Mrs Baines
Priory School
Burr Hill Chase
Southend-on-Sea
SS2 6PE

Dear Mrs Baines

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Priory School

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and governors gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 14 October 2010, for the time you gave to our telephone discussion and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I am most grateful for the welcome and help I received from students and staff during my visit.

Since the last s5 inspection, the governing body has appointed a new headteacher who took up post in January 2010. Subsequently, two members of staff were promoted into assistant headteacher posts, one leading pastoral provision and the other academic matters. Recently, girls have been admitted and there are currently two on roll. The school was awarded Healthy School status and has submitted an application for specialist status in the areas of behaviour and personal and social development.

As a result of the inspection on April 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

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

September 2010



While attendance remains too low, there is firm evidence of improvement as a result of school leaders' strong drive on several new initiatives to reduced absences, persistent absence in particular. The number of students who are persistently absent has reduced significantly and there has been a small increase in attendance in 2010. Staff are constantly encouraging good attendance and punctuality. Students have attendance targets and, the school monitors and supports these well, with help from the local authority attendance team, and rewards students' success. The introduction of a breakfast club has succeeded as most students come in for this. They are greeted by staff and their first lesson, focusing on personal and social issues, contributes to a good start to the day. Behaviour is satisfactory and there is no disruption. A minority of students had long histories of poor attendance before Priory School. For them, persistent absence has been endemic and, currently, a few students, who are near to the end of their school careers, are hard to reach. School leaders have now put into place intervention plans whereby these students, including some who are temporarily excluded, work on well-planned, closely-monitored programmes at home.

Achievement is satisfactory. While standards are low as a result of the previous disruption to learning caused by students' behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, those in school are settled in lessons and apply effort to their work. The curriculum has undergone a recent thorough review and now offers intervention plans and a range of accreditation. These elements motivate students to work, with the result that the volume of accreditation they are achieving has increased. However, the curriculum and intervention plans are at an early stage of development and courses are not always challenging for some students, but are nevertheless engaging them. Teaching is satisfactory. The drive to improve planning and assessment is having a positive impact on learning and progress, which are also satisfactory. Teachers now have an accurate measure of each student's attainment and use this effectively in lesson planning and for setting individual targets. What teachers intend students to learn is usually made clear to them. This is done most effectively in science but is not yet sharply focused in every lesson.

The school's tracking of progress has improved satisfactorily, providing leaders with a clear picture of individual students' academic progress and personal development. Although this is at an early stage of development, it has a positive impact on the quality of individual targets. However, leaders have not used tracking to identify a range of challenging whole-school targets, even though the data and its analysis are now in place.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and has planned improvement systematically, and developments are being driven forward at a brisk pace. The local authority fully supports the headteacher's ambitions for the school. It has underwritten a substantial refurbishment of the premises, which has made the

school safe, secure and a pleasant environment. The impressive new kitchen means catering is now in-school, allowing staff to promote students' nourishment, healthy lifestyles and well-being more effectively. The staff work cohesively as a team, their morale is good and they have benefitted from the boost to their professional development through recent training opportunities. The atmosphere in the school is positive and has a good impact on relationships and behaviour. Assistant headteachers are effective in their roles, leading the improvements to teaching, the curriculum, care, guidance and support for students, and engagement with parents. Networks of support with a variety of agencies are in place and fit closely with the school's priority of preparing students for the future.

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

Alan Lemon
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Work with the local authority to improve attendance.
- Improve lesson planning so that there is a focus on what individuals are expected to learn, and a clear means of assessing whether they have been successful.
- Improve the clarity and use of target setting in all aspects of the school's work.