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4 April 2011

Mr D Garrido
Headteacher
Ash Manor School
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Dear Mr Garrido

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Ash Manor School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Grace Marriott and I inspected your school on 30 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please convey out thanks to your students and to the members of your governing body for the help they provided.

As a result of the inspection on 27 and 28 January 2010, 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.

Students' progress and learning have improved. Attainment is higher and improved monitoring systems indicate that GCSE outcomes in 2011 will rise to a position of above average. Satisfactory progress has been made in improving teaching and learning. In lessons observed, learning was usually satisfactory or good, but there was a wide variation, which is an outcome confirmed by the school's own monitoring. Learning is most effective when students are set challenging and engaging tasks, and where they are encouraged to be creative thinkers. In the better lessons, students are able to work in groups, or independently; they are required to tackle stimulating and interesting questions. They are encouraged to use a range of sources, including information and communication technology (ICT), to research answers. In less effective lessons, creativity is stifled, teachers do too much of the work and speak too much. Consequently the pace of learning slows and, in



some cases, some students become restless and less attentive. A further inconsistency is that not all chances to develop the students' literacy skills are seized. A prime reason why the progress in learning is satisfactory and no better is that on too few occasions are students required to provide detailed written answers. The reliance of some staff on worksheets restricts the scope for students to be creative and innovative.

Satisfactory progress has been made since the inspection in developing the curriculum. At both key stages, enterprising changes have been made. In Key Stage 3 there are now three distinct pathways that students can follow. This development has led to an expansion, for example, in the provision for modern foreign languages. At Key Stage 4 a wider range of subjects, including more vocational options, is offered. The learning needs of all students are now being catered for more aptly. There are initial indications that these changes are leading to higher attainment. Most of these developments are, however, recent and time is needed to allow them to embed and to have a strong positive influence on student outcomes.

Assessment procedures have improved considerably. The school now has a firm view on how each individual student is performing and what they need to do to improve. At a whole-school level, target setting and tracking arrangements are good. The improvements at departmental level and in individual classrooms are no better than satisfactory because there are inconsistencies in practice. Senior staff are aware of this and are working to secure greater consistency. It is noteworthy that in interviews conducted with students, they too highlighted the fact that the quality of the feedback received on their work is variable and teacher dependent.

Specialist technology status continues to confer benefits. For example, various initiatives involving science, technology, mathematics and engineering have helped boost students' attainment. These initiatives have been as varied as designing cars to environmental projects associated with rainforests. Specialist status has raised the school's profile with both its education partners and its wider community and business partners.

Improvements in self-evaluation have been satisfactory since inspectors last visited the school. The support offered by the local authority has been satisfactory and has helped the school to improve, especially in terms of monitoring the quality of classroom learning. Although inconsistencies remain, learning, the use of assessment information and the curriculum have all improved. These developments all indicate a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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
Bill Stoneham
Additional Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to ensure it is more consistently good or better through:
 - using more active and practical approaches to teaching so that all lessons are more lively and interesting
 - making more effective use of ICT to promote learning, both in whole-class teaching and in the activities that students undertake
 - providing more opportunities for students to be creative and become more independent in their learning
 - ensuring that teaching supports and challenges all groups of students.
- Improve the consistency of both verbal and written assessment, so that students are clear about the next steps of their learning.
- Develop the curriculum so that it matches the learning needs of all students.