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20 January 2012

Miss Zoe King  
St Helena School  
Sheepen Road  
Colchester  
CO3 3LE

Dear Miss King

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour:  
monitoring inspection of St Helena School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 January 2012 with George Rayner, additional inspector, and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to students and staff.

A new headteacher has been in post since September 2011.

As a result of the inspection on 26 May 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 the effectiveness of the school in improving pupils' behaviour is also satisfactory.

Performance data for 2011 indicate that students' attainment remains low. The proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes including mathematics and English declined to below the national average. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades A\* and A was well below the national average. Boys, disabled students and those with special educational needs attained significantly lower standards than their peers. With the exception of mathematics and humanities, students made less progress than expected. Progress was particularly weak in science.

However, the school is beginning to move to improve the attainment and progress made by pupils. The school's own assessment data, confirmed by observations of current standards made in class, indicate improvements. In all core subjects, indications are of improving performance and progress. These improvements are most marked in science in Years 7 and 8 and in English in Years 10 and 11. Progress



is accelerating. In addition, attendance and persistent absence have improved because of the actions that the school has taken.

The school has put significant recent effort into the improvement of teaching and learning, and this is beginning to take effect. Leaders' lesson observations now accurately identify the best practice, giving them a good understanding of the school's teaching. In class, the planning of lessons is inconsistent. There is a significant proportion of good or better practice where teachers structure classes to cater for the needs and attainment of all students. For example, in one mathematics lesson, an extension activity was given for those who had completed the work. The most successful classes are those where the teachers have successfully encouraged the development of independent learning skills. In these, students learn effectively and are often skilled in asking and discussing issues and questions. Although these skills are increasingly well developed in Years 10 and 11, they are slow to develop in Key Stage 3.

Marking and homework have improved, although students report that there is too much variability between subjects and teachers. Much homework is very well marked with constructive comments and suggestions for improvement. However, this practice is inconsistent, with some books hardly marked. Poor grammar and spelling are often uncorrected. Increasingly, students are being set challenging targets and teachers are beginning to work towards them. As with other aspects of teaching and learning, though, this is inconsistent. A majority of pupils are aware of their targets and, in broad terms, are aware of what they need to do to improve.

The school has made significant changes to improve behaviour, and these are beginning to have a sustained effect. Students and staff report that behaviour is improving. Significantly, the number of exclusions has declined as good use is made of the in-school isolation unit. The introduction of a new behaviour policy with clear rewards and sanctions is beginning to have an effect. Students understand what the consequences of poor behaviour are. The number of instances of unsatisfactory behaviour is declining. Inspectors observed no instances of inadequate behaviour although, in a few classes, low-level disruption was evident, especially where students were not being stretched or allowed to work independently. Students say that they feel safe and that, although behaviour has improved, the implementation of the new behaviour policy is not consistent between teachers.

The new headteacher is making a determined start in improving the school. She has correctly identified where aspects of the school need to be improved and has concentrated, rightly, on the improvement of teaching and learning. Systems are now being introduced quickly and are beginning to have an effect, as is evidenced by improving standards and behaviour. Aspects of the school remain inconsistent, however, with some areas improving more quickly than others. Middle leaders feel well supported in their roles and are beginning to work so that systems are consistent between subject areas. Examples include the assessment of progress and the identification and sharing of the best teaching practice between subject areas.

firm line has been taken on school uniform and behaviour, with consequent improvements. School improvement plans and self-assessments are now sensible, with appropriately challenging targets and timescales. However, they are more variable at subject and departmental level. Overall, the school is improving steadily under renewed leadership.

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

Ian Seath  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010**

- Accelerate students' progress and increase their enjoyment in learning by ensuring that all teachers:
  - identify clear learning objectives for each lesson and ensure that all students are challenged
  - assess pupils' progress during lessons and adapt teaching accordingly
  - provide regular feedback to students that includes how to improve their work.
  
- Embed improvement by making regular checks to ensure the school's policies and procedures are implemented consistently, particularly in relation to behaviour, homework, and the marking of students' work.