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19 September 2012

Mr I Johnson
Headteacher
Samuel King's School
Church Road
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Dear Mr Johnson

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Samuel King's School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 September 2012, and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please convey my thanks to your staff and students for their positive response towards me throughout the visit. Also thank the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, and the local authority officer for finding time to meet with me in person.

Since the previous inspection in February, a new headteacher started at the school at the beginning of the summer term 2012. Seven staff have left the school, with one new teacher joining at the beginning of this term. The new headteacher has redefined roles and responsibilities for members of the senior leadership team, which includes line management responsibilities for other staff and different aspects of the school's provision. The governing body has undergone some significant changes with the election of a new chair, vice chair and two parent governors. A local authority officer, with specific links to the school's improvement programme, now attends all governing body meetings as an ex-officio member. Further changes to the governing body are close to being ratified, but these had not been approved at the time of this visit. The number of students on roll has fallen from the previous inspection by six, with the total now standing at 155.

As a result of the inspection on 8 February 2012, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The most recent published results at GCSE show that the school has improved in almost all areas, but especially so in the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE A*-C grades, with English and mathematics; the figure here has risen from 54% in 2011 to 66% in 2012. Other outcomes remain very positive, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Attendance is good across all year groups, and the school has maintained its

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impressive record of year-on-year no permanent exclusions. Fixed-term exclusions remain very low.

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection due, primarily, to the improved quality of monitoring by senior leaders. Better practice is now seen in the use of student performance data, lesson planning that provides opportunities to support key literacy and numeracy skills, and in the use of homework, which is regularly checked by teachers. However, there is still much that needs to improve if the school is to make all teaching at least good. In particular, a better balance between teacher-directed and student-initiated learning needs to be achieved more consistently in all lessons so that the students' motivation to learn is both self-initiated and maintained; this principle also needs to be applied by teaching assistants. Some teaching already achieves this, for example, in food technology, but too much seen during this visit is too directed and controlled, with too little consideration of the varying learning needs and prior attainment of all students. The quality of teachers' marking is also still too variable in quality. Where it is good, the students have a thorough understanding of how they can make improvements to their work. However, too much is simply ticked with no indication of the quality achieved, or what the student must do to improve it further. Some students' work is poorly presented and not sufficiently challenged by teachers.

The overall quality of leadership and management is gaining in momentum, and these now contribute significantly to a clearer cohesive and strategic overview of what the school needs to do to make the necessary improvements. The newly re-structured senior management team and governing body have achieved a greater clarity and purpose to their respective roles, which means that all associated with the school have a good understanding about what needs to be done to address the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Action planning, for example, is detailed and focused on important improvement areas, with the processes and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's progress over the life of the action plan robust. However, this monitoring work has yet to show fully how the school's specialist technology status impacts on the quality teaching and students' learning across the whole school.

The school has received timely and well-focused support from a range of external partners, including the local authority and local partner schools. The local authority's statement of action met all requirements from Ofsted, and its most recent review accurately assessed the strengths of the school, the progress being made, and the areas that need further attention.

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,

Mr Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector

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Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012 are:

- Raise attainment and ensure all students make at least good progress in lessons by:
 - developing a consistent approach to teachers' planning and to systems to regularly track and assess students' achievements across the school
 - making sure all teachers interrogate assessment information about students' prior learning and use it to plan interesting work and lessons that are closely matched to students varying starting points
 - ensuring teachers plan the work of teaching assistants carefully
 - ensuring all teachers adhere to the school's marking policy so every student knows how well they are doing and what they need to do to achieve challenging targets
 - developing a coherent homework policy that includes regular feedback
 - extending opportunities for students to take more responsibility for their learning and to develop the independence and collaborative working skills

- Ensure effective leadership and management by:
 - making sure leaders have a regular strategic overview of the performance of individual and groups of students, to enable the timely evaluation of students' progress and hold teachers to account fully for that progress
 - developing the expertise of subject leaders in monitoring, evaluating and improving the subject area, and involving them fully in whole-school self-evaluation
 - ensuring outcomes of regular monitoring of teaching and learning lead to training to enhance teachers' skills where needed, and to share the good practice evident
 - extending the range of high-quality information recently provided to the governing body so it can always hold the school rigorously to account for its work
 - developing the good practice in promoting students' literacy, communication and numeracy skills seen in some subjects, into a planned whole-school strategy.