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Dear Mrs August

OFSTED MONITORING OF SCHOOLS WHOSE OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS HAS BEEN JUDGED SATISFACTORY

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your Academy on 30 November 2006, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. May I also offer my thanks to the students and chair of governors, who were most helpful in our discussions.

As a result of the inspection on 30 November 2005 the Academy was asked to:

- raise achievement
- strengthen further the quality of teaching and learning, so that more is consistently good
- improve teachers' use of assessment in their day-to-day work
- continue to develop the role of middle managers
- establish effective sixth form provision that meets students' needs and aspirations.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement.

Progress towards raising achievement is satisfactory. The end of Key Stage 3 national tests results in 2006 show the proportion of students reaching the expected Level 5 has increased by 6% in mathematics and by 10% in science. Unvalidated GCSE results for 2006 indicate that students met the academy's target for the second year running. The number of students achieving five or more GCSEs at the higher grades rose from 23% in 2005 to 29% in 2006.

The percentage of students achieving at least one GCSE grade A* to C was 98% in 2006. The academy's focus on developing the curriculum for Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is at an early stage and the impact of this upon students' achievements is not yet evident. A judgement on student progress in the sixth form cannot be securely made, as there are currently small numbers in only the second year since opening and turnover is also very high. However, students in the sixth form are very confident about the progress they are making and are clear that this is because of good teaching and better choices. There are variations in the achievements made by students in different subjects across the school. Inconsistencies are largely linked to the quality of teaching and learning and in the use of assessment data to inform what students should learn next.

Progress to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning is good. Very effective monitoring of teaching and learning is carried out by curriculum managers, year directors and the senior leadership team (SLT). Teaching is now judged by the academy to be satisfactory or better in the vast majority of lessons. About 10% of lessons are seen as outstanding with about half being good and above. The inspection confirms the academy's view. Good attention is given to improving teaching through targeted professional training. The Academy should now focus more on the quality of learning. In the best lessons students are knowledgeable about their performance targets and how to achieve these. Where parents are also well informed this improves the rate of students' progress through precise expectations of learning. However, this good practice is not yet consistent across the academy.

Teachers' use of assessment is progressing satisfactorily. The Academy has a good database of students' achievements. This effectively tracks the progress of individual students and targets suitable levels of attainment. It enables curriculum managers and the SLT to monitor progress and they have a secure view as a result. Recent improvements to the academy's database have enabled all staff to fully access students' performance online. However, this is not always used to best effect by some teachers to help raise standards in learning because assessment information is insufficiently well used to inform planning. A sound programme of training for staff is in place.

The development of the role of middle managers shows good progress. Appropriate training has been completed by curriculum managers, year directors and the SLT. This has been instrumental in driving the development of the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Vocational choices are improved with students speaking particularly highly of the Business BTEC which has a 100% pass rate. A partnership arrangement with a local independent selective school sixth form is catering well for A-level students' needs. In turn the Academy offers its vocational options to students from the school. A sound middle management structure empowers staff and encourages initiative. Middle managers speak enthusiastically about good levels of consultation with the SLT and they appreciate their ability to

contribute to decision making. The contribution of middle managers to improving the quality of teaching is well illustrated by their comprehensive monitoring role. This is used effectively by the SLT to target improvements.

Progress in the provision for the sixth form is satisfactory. Students are very appreciative of the head of sixth form for her good support, care and consideration. The review of the sixth form curriculum is appropriate though at an early stage of being embedded. The pathways and courses it aims to create bode well for providing for students wide ranging needs. For example, plans are at an advanced stage to introduce diplomas and NVO qualifications in accountancy, nursing, air cabin crew and arts courses. The sixth form students have a good selection of opportunities which enrich their learning such as classes in self-defence, food hygiene and dance and workshops in self-awareness.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your academy.

Yours sincerely

John Coleman

Her Majesty's Inspector