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Mr R Butler  
The Principal  
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Dear Mr Butler

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 13 November 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. In addition, the discussions I had with senior staff, students, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority were most helpful. Staff were professional in their responses to questions and showed a strong commitment to tackling the school's issues. Students I met were confident and positive about recent improvements. Performance in GCSE examinations in 2007, when the proportion of students gaining 5 or more A\* to C grades rose from 38% to 51%, is testament to the effective and prompt response the school has made to the inspection in March.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 22 and 23 March 2006, the school was asked to:

- raise achievement and standards in Key Stage 4 and sustain them at acceptable levels
- eradicate weak teaching and increase the amount of good teaching
- ensure that the curriculum meets the wide range of pupils' different aptitudes and abilities
- ensure that the leadership of subjects is of consistently high quality so that underachievement is tackled effectively
- ensure that governors are better able to hold the school to account.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

Marked improvements in GCSE performance are the result of improvements in both the climate for learning and quality of teaching. Most subjects performed better than in 2006, but good results in some subjects are not yet being matched by performance in resistant materials, graphics and art. Results in English language and mathematics remain satisfactory, although science fell back slightly in 2007. Standards across subjects remain uneven and, despite significant improvements, a legacy of underachievement remains. The college is confident that targets in 2008 will be met. Students are largely on track to meet them and this will represent continuing improvement.

The college has worked successfully to improve the quality of teaching. As one student remarked, 'If you want to learn you can.' Students also commented on the calmer learning environment and the positive attitudes and behaviour of most students. This was reflected in my own observations. By and large, students are keen to do well and lessons are characterised by purposeful attitudes. Key factors have been a more stable teaching staff, higher expectations, and a common lesson planning format. The role of senior managers in rooting out weak teaching and in supporting teachers has been very effective. My own brief sampling of teaching confirmed the school's own evaluations. However, more needs to be done to ensure consistently good teaching. In particular, planning needs a sharper focus on how well students learn, alongside a more effective use of assessment to set tasks which challenge students at their own level. Not all students I spoke to knew their own targets or what they needed to improve. In addition, teaching remains over-directed and students are not given enough opportunities to organise their own learning.

Much has already been achieved to broaden the curriculum and, in particular, to improve the vocational offer. There are well advanced plans to develop the Key Stage 4 curriculum further and some innovative ideas, in collaboration with the other secondary schools on the campus, have the capacity to make a significant impact. The college is adopting an increasingly flexible response to personal learning needs in its curriculum planning. However, the impact of the college's specialist status as a technology college on improving achievement and curriculum provision remains weak.

As principal, your own decisive and determined leadership of the college has been pivotal in driving forward change. A commitment to spreading leadership capacity more widely is proving effective in providing sustained improvement. In this, the contribution of all members of the extended leadership group to college improvement has been impressive. Subject leaders are responding positively to this new culture of devolved responsibility and are embracing change enthusiastically. More effective procedures for using and analysing performance data are being introduced, enabling both subject leaders and heads of house to track progress, identify trends, and set challenging targets. However, this is not yet fully rooted in practice and the quality of leadership at subject level, whilst improving, remains uneven.

Governors now meet more regularly and have a better understanding of their contribution to school improvement. Attachments to specific areas of the college

improvement plan and to subjects enable them to know the work of the college better and to ask questions with increasing confidence.

The impact of local authority intervention in the college has been good. A comprehensive range of effective advice and continuing collaborative support have been key factors in the good progress being made. Monitoring visits have helped confirm the school's own evaluation of its progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Tony Shield  
Additional Inspector