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Mr Colin Bateman  
The Headteacher  
The International School and Community College, East Birmingham  
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Dear Mr Bateman

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 27 November 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the students and governors who also spent time in conversation with me.

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 30 April and 1 May 2008, the school was asked to raise standards in English and mathematics, particularly in Years 7 to 9; to broaden the range of teaching and learning styles, so that students are more actively involved in their learning, and to ensure that students' targets are sufficiently challenging; to develop the role of middle leaders so that they are more effective in raising standards and more rigorous in their monitoring and evaluation; to ensure that the curriculum meets statutory requirements; and, to improve relationships with parents and carers so that they feel more involved in their children's education.

Since the school's last inspection, there have been changes in staffing in the mathematics faculty, including the appointment of an advanced skills teacher with the responsibility of developing teaching and learning in the subject and numeracy across the curriculum. Heads of student progress have been appointed for both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 to monitor students' progress and arrange intervention and support programmes where underachievement is identified. The need to repay a very large budget deficit accumulated before the arrival of the present senior leadership team has imposed significant constraints on resources available to the school.

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 students' achievement.

Leadership and management continue to be strengthened at all levels. As headteacher, your vision and actions have been widely credited for transforming the ethos of the school. In carrying through this vision you have been ably supported by a cohesive senior team. Together, you have established a positive climate for learning across the school. Clear expectations have been established for managers' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning through regular checks on pupils' work and regular observation of lessons. These have empowered heads of faculties and subjects to manage more effectively improvement in their areas. Furthermore, managers at all levels have received very effective support from local authority advisers and consultants in developing their skills in evaluating teaching and learning. As one head of faculty said, 'We have now been given the tools to do the job.' Where a need for improvement in teaching is identified, either through monitoring by managers or by teachers themselves, support and professional development are offered swiftly and with good effect.

Teaching and learning are improving steadily as a consequence of these interventions. Students particularly note the benefits of the drive to promote their more active engagement in lessons and homework, through a more varied range of activities which help students think for themselves. They also appreciate the considerable improvement in the quality of assessment and marking. 'Only a couple of teachers used to give detailed marking comments,' said one student, 'but now it is most of them.' Detailed marking gives students clear feedback on how well they have done and what they need to improve in relation to their own, now very challenging, targets. However, marking is not always followed up to ensure that students have responded, with the consequence that for a minority of students work remains poorly organised and incomplete. Teachers plan lessons to take account of students' differing abilities, but in managing classes sometimes insufficient account is taken of students' readiness to move on to more challenging activities. Opportunities are missed in some classes to draw more disaffected students into activities by grouping them with others or by targeting them with questions.

Standards rose in 2008 so that the school attained its best results ever in tests in Year 9 and examinations overall at the end of Year 11. While test results at the end of Year 9 remained well below average, overall GCSE and BTEC results were in line with national averages. Students' academic achievements in English and mathematics have been slower to improve. The proportion of students gaining 5 GCSE grades at A\* to C or above including English and mathematics declined in 2008, and is well below government targets. In Year 9 national tests, too many students in the lower and middle ability range made insufficient progress in mathematics and science. The school's own tracking data shows that slow progress continues for a relatively high proportion of students in current cohorts. However, the problem is clearly reducing as the quality of learning improves in lessons and as students identified as underachieving are given additional support. Higher attainers

in particular are making good progress in fast-track groups, where expectations and the pace of learning are high.

Appropriate changes have been made to the curriculum and it now complies with statutory requirements. The curriculum offers a rich choice of applied and vocational options in Years 10 and 11 which, in keeping with the school's business and enterprise specialism, is supported by strong links with local businesses, and with partner schools and colleges. These partnerships support a strong programme of work-related, enterprise and community activities. Good examination results in applied and vocational courses have contributed strongly to rising attainment and improved progress by Year 11. Performance in specialist subjects is variable, with results from information and communication technology courses a consistent strength, but there was a dip in results in mathematics in 2008.

Parents' views of the school, as indicated through the good responses to regular parents' surveys, are positive and improving. The school has worked hard and effectively to increase the flow of information to parents and to ensure that it responds promptly to contacts from parents. Visits to parents by the school's family liaison officer have contributed to a good improvement in students' attendance.

The local authority's support for the school is good, particularly in building the capacity of school leaders to monitor, evaluate, and support improvement. The local authority action plan is appropriately referenced in the school's own improvement plan. The support which is deployed is regularly reviewed following evaluation activities so that, for example, consultant visits and other support to the mathematics faculty now go well beyond those originally planned. Teachers have found 'focus weeks', such as the recent week on 'active engagement of students', particularly helpful in promoting good practice..

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
Additional Inspector