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Mrs Kenny Frederick
Headteacher
George Green's School
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Dear Mrs Frederick

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 19 May 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Could you also convey my thanks to the chair of governors, the local authority adviser, the School Improvement Partner, staff and students, to whom I spoke during my visit.

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 September 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise achievement and standards in Key Stages 3 and 4
- improve the quality of teaching and learning
- strengthen the ability of senior leaders to hold middle managers and teachers fully to account for the academic performance of students
- develop a culture of high expectations in all aspects of school life for both staff and students.

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 the pupils' achievement.

The school has taken effective steps to improve the rate of progress students make in Years 10 and 11. Based on the school's monitoring data, they are now making good progress at the end of Key Stage 4. The good tracking mechanisms allow the school to intervene and address the progress of targeted groups and individuals with care and precision. In Key Stage 3, school leaders and managers have concentrated on laying strong foundations for the future. Data are being used well to identify groups that require additional support, to ensure that all students' rate of progress is accelerated. For example, literacy support in all subjects has been implemented to improve the attainment of White British boys. Students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3.

Overall, standards at the end of Year 9 and 11 are set to remain low. However, the school's monitoring data indicate that the proportion of students set to achieve five or more A* to C grades, and five or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English, at GCSE is likely to rise considerably. The latter is set to improve by over 10%. The school also predicts improved success in the majority of its specialist subjects. The best performance is in drama, where the school is on track to exceed its target. The targets in media and citizenship are also on track to be met.

Students are proud of their school and value the good relationships they have with each other and with staff. They say that bullying is rare and tackled well. They value the improved support to achieve better in lessons. Students also noted that there had been an increased level of evaluative comments in their work to enable them to know how to improve.

Since the last inspection, leaders have responded swiftly by implementing and consolidating sound strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The proportion of good lessons has improved considerably, although the proportion of outstanding lessons is unchanged. Grades awarded by the inspector were broadly in line with the school's own judgement. In the best lessons observed, teachers planned learning objectives well and used effective questions which were cleverly woven into good discussions. In these lessons, students participated well and supported each other in performing the set tasks. Marking of students' work was detailed and clearly identified their next steps of learning. They responded and reviewed their own learning in light of interim targets set by teachers. In other lessons, teachers' assessment strategies did not enable them to identify students' understanding of learning objectives and the pace of these lessons was slow. In one lesson, learning outcomes were not clearly identified. The whole-school strategy of 'steps to success', where learning outcomes are broken down into smaller chunks, is used effectively by some teachers. However, there is some variation in its use and application by teachers.

Tracking of students' progress is undertaken carefully and regularly. Learning managers scrutinise students' performance well to identify the appropriate support required for each student or group. Intervention strategies are wide-ranging and imaginative. For example, learning managers identify more successful students, or 'change agents', from groups of marginal performers, who are taken on residential trips to develop their skills as mentors to support other students. Other successful strategies have included the use of 'coaching trios' which are carefully devised groups of Year 7 students who support each other's learning. Parents are effectively involved in their children's progress, especially where specific intervention strategies have been identified. One such initiative has been to encourage parents to allow their Year 7 sons to write shopping lists for the family's shopping expeditions. The increased reporting procedures have had a good impact and are being used in a variety of ways. For example, parents are informed when more able students are underperforming. Parents of less able students who exceed their target grades are sent congratulatory letters. Students are appreciative of the support being given by the school and the impact on their performance.

The headteacher and her senior leaders have set a clear agenda for improvement. Senior leadership roles have been established and effective performance monitoring arrangements of middle leaders are in place. The school's development plan and self-evaluation are broadly accurate although cumbersome. The school acknowledges this and is taking action to reduce the amount of documentation. Progress against these specified actions are checked and discussed regularly. The introduction of 'self-review' activities is working well. Along with the increased rigour in assessment of lesson observations and well-targeted 'learning walks', the proportion of good lessons has improved. These measures have also enabled leaders and managers to identify whole-school and individual development needs. Senior leaders' training on judging the quality of teaching and learning has been successfully disseminated to middle leaders and other observers. Lesson observations are used well to diagnose the strengths and development needs of teachers and areas for development are acted upon. The teaching and learning group consists of a team of successful teachers who are trained to support others. However, the school has not as yet fully evaluated the effectiveness of this.

Middle leaders know their responsibilities and are undertaking them well. The school is set to achieve improved results in mathematics, English and science in Key Stage 4. There are clear lines of accountability and appropriate internal and external support is provided for new middle leaders. Monitoring of departmental performance is regular and teachers use data well. Actions taken to address underachievement are having a positive impact. In a response to the significant students' underachievement in 2008, the heads of Spanish and geography have put effective measures in place that have proved successful. In Spanish, strategies have included providing intensive support for students' speaking and listening skills, and closer scrutiny of progress and achievement. Teachers in the geography department have received support to improve the effectiveness of their marking and assessment and the new head of department has been given appropriate professional development for his new role.

Measures to raise expectations of both staff and students are in place throughout the school. The improved use of more challenging targets has been fully implemented and there is an improved student voice. Some students participate as 'pupil partners' in the school's learning walks. Chosen students are trained as observers to judge the quality of teaching and learning in lessons. The focus at present is to use pupil partners to assess the effectiveness of teachers who have recently joined the school. Pupil partners have been instrumental in identifying areas for whole-school development, such as poor student punctuality.

The assistant headteacher with responsibility for the school's specialism has set about evaluating and reviewing the impact of the specialist status. The school has put in place interim measures to improve students' participation in specialist subjects in Key Stage 3. Drama, media and citizenship will be delivered discretely to all Year 7, 8 and 9 students by the end of the academic year. The objective of increasing the engagement of the school's community has led to improved partnership

arrangements. Students have participated in a school exchange, which has enabled them to develop their citizenship skills and to gain experience of life in a rural setting. It is too early to judge the full impact of much of this work.

The local authority supports the work of the school well. Along with the School Improvement Partner, they have been robust in their challenge of the school's performance. They have also provided effective mentoring and support to leaders and managers to improve teaching and learning. The school's ambitious but appropriate targets in respect of students' achievements are monitored well.

Other external support to improve the school's performance has been well targeted. English, mathematics, science and geography have received good support, which has contributed to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, assessment, and leadership and management.

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

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector