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Alan Howson
Headteacher
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Dear Alan,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on Thursday 19 November 2009, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Please do extend my sincere thanks to the staff and pupils we visited in lessons, and to members of the senior leadership team whom we interviewed.

Since the last inspection, the school has recently taken on Trust and Foundation School status that will further strengthen extended school activities and its capacity to work with local communities. As a 'sample' school within the local authority for the BSF project, the school is scheduled to commence works in 2011. The local authority's School Improvement Partner has worked effectively with the school and provided a focused evaluation of the strengths and areas the school needs to improve. The school is working effectively as part of the PIXEL group of schools, and specifically targeting students who are at risk of disengaging from school life and their academic studies.

As a result of the inspection on 19–20 November 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards for students of all abilities, including those from minority ethnic groups
- ensure that the new tracking system is used rigorously to match work closely to students' ability
- further improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that students make more progress.



Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements, and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The school has made good progress in significantly improving the outcomes for pupils and successfully raising standards for the majority of pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. In Key Stage 3 the school has focused on underachieving groups, Black Caribbean students, students with learning difficulties and lower-ability girls. It has introduced specific activities and support materials in lessons, along with academic mentoring, one-to-one tuition and encouraging students to join self-esteem-raising groups. In Key Stage 4, along with these interventions, the school is developing a more appropriate curriculum, including BTEC courses, such as health and social care, and level one literacy and numeracy qualifications. In Key Stage 3, 2009 results indicate that the school has met its FFTD targets for attainment at Level 5+ English and is just below the targets in mathematics and science. In Key Stage 4, the school has successfully raised attainment to broadly national averages for both five A* to C GCSEs (including English and mathematics) and five A* to C GCSEs. In terms of two levels' progress, students made better progress in English than in mathematics, while all groups of students improved on the previous year, including underachieving minority ethnic groups and girls. The school rightly continues to prioritise effective actions for students who do not fulfil their academic potential based on their prior attainment; in particular, lower-to-middle-band girls and Caribbean students. These groups have not attained the same results as their peers.

The school has made satisfactory progress in tracking of students' progress. This is now rigorous and staff follow this by implementing interventions such as booster classes and additional support, where necessary. Senior leaders, working closely with middle managers, can demonstrate the impact of these in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 outcomes. However, in lessons, the valuable information that teachers have on students' prior attainment and formative assessment outcomes is not used consistently in planning learning tasks and activities that meet the needs of all students, in particular, those of lower ability. Where this is not so effective, a minority of students lack challenge or struggle to understand basic concepts critical to underpinning knowledge, or, for instance, are not developing the appropriate skills they need, including writing skills. Where assessment processes successfully underpin the planning of learning, students are challenged and well supported and aspire to higher levels of attainment. The majority of students interviewed knew their learning targets and what they needed to do to improve.

Good teaching observed by inspectors, especially in English and science, developed higher-order thinking skills through structuring effective opportunities for students to work in small groups and to carry out self-evaluations and peer assessments of their learning and progress. In some cases, the pace and timing of the assessment activities were too hurried and not all teachers checked what their students were learning. Marking of students' work is inconsistent and while there are some good examples of assessed work, teachers do not ensure that students have redrafted or corrected their work before moving on to the next stage of learning.



Quality assurance processes are thorough and senior leaders are highly committed to steering forward improvements in teaching and learning, in particular, creating a greater focus on the learning and progress of all pupils. However, owing to staff absence and redeployment of more experienced teaching staff to other areas of work, the school's reliance on short-term supply cover has resulted in discontinuity in some students' learning and progress, especially in mathematics. The school is aware that it needs to prioritise a strategy for minimising the negative impact of this, so as to ensure greater consistency in teaching, learning and progress.

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

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector