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4 May 2010

Mr J P Morrison
Headmaster
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Dear Mr Morrison

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 April 2010, 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 staff, governors and students who gave their time to the discussions.

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes to the school's leadership and management arrangements, including the appointment of a new head of sixth form, and the appointment of new subject leaders in science and information and communication technology (ICT). The chair of governors has been in post since November 2009.

As a result of the inspection on 21 May 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure assessment data is used effectively at all levels to raise students' achievement and eradicate underachievement
- raise the quality of teaching and learning so that more of it is good, all students are challenged and achievement is accelerated
- develop leadership at all levels so that monitoring and evaluation systems are rigorous, accurate and promote improvement
- ensure all students receive their entitlement in ICT.

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

From above average starting points, students make satisfactory progress during their time in the school, resulting in standards of attainment which are above



average. In some subjects, notably in history, religious studies and mathematics, students make good and sometimes outstanding progress by the end of Key Stage 4. However, progress in English and science, though improving, remains satisfactory. In 2009, Year 11 students did not meet their challenging targets in a number of subjects, including English literature and ICT. In addition, students of Black African heritage did not achieve as well as other groups of learners.

School leaders have taken robust action to tackle areas of weakness with the result that incidents of underachievement are being addressed more effectively than before. Very significant improvements to data management systems are now enabling staff to identify and arrest students' underachievement quickly. For example, improved use of assessment information has enabled the school to carefully identify Year 11 students in most need of support in preparation for their GCSE examinations. As a result, many students are benefiting from additional teaching and revision opportunities after school and at weekends. The head of sixth form has played a key role in ensuring that all staff make effective use of performance data to promote good achievement. As a result, sixth form students make good and improving progress.

Monitoring and evaluation systems have been strengthened to promote improvement, for example through more rigorous procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Subject leaders are held more clearly to account than before and the progress of their departments against agreed targets is regularly monitored. However, while senior staff are increasingly rigorous in their analysis of performance data, not all middle leaders give due attention to students' achievement or the progress made by different groups of learners in their self-evaluation. While governors provide good support for the school, they are not sufficiently well informed about school performance data to hold school leaders fully to account over students' achievement.

The school's status as a specialist humanities college is being used to spearhead improvements to teaching and learning through delivery of staff training within the school. Humanities Week and strong links with the school in Tanzania provide valuable experiences which make a significant contribution to be students' spiritual and moral development.

The school rightly judges that the quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. However, leaders and managers acknowledge that lessons are not yet consistently good in all curriculum areas. Teachers are passionate about their subjects and use their excellent subject knowledge to prepare older students well for public examinations. In the most effective lessons, teachers use clear success criteria which are shared with students so that they can understand precisely how well they have done by the end of the lesson. Good opportunities for students to reflect on the quality of their own and each other's work mean that they have a very clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In these lessons, teachers use comprehensive assessment



information to ensure that all learners are challenged and achievement is accelerated. However, such practice is not yet consistent and in some lessons students are expected to do the same work regardless of their differing abilities. Not all teachers have yet developed strategies to ensure that all students are fully engaged and involved throughout the lesson. There is also inconsistency in the use of assessment during lessons to regularly check the learning of the whole group. The quality of marking is variable and is not yet consistently of sufficiently high quality to have the necessary impact on raising students' achievement.

Since the last inspection, the school has improved the curriculum as part of its drive to raise achievement. Opportunities to study a growing range of qualifications, including BTEC courses in science, ICT and business studies are beginning to have an impact in raising students' achievement. While all students can now opt to study for accredited qualifications in ICT in Years 10 and 11, the ICT curriculum still does not meet statutory requirements. The school does not yet adequately monitor the range and content of ICT provision for all students in Key Stage 4 and has not ensured that the attainment of all students in ICT is recorded.

The quality of care, guidance and support continue to be strengths of the school. The Manresa internal referral unit has had a significant impact on raising the aspirations, conduct and self-esteem of students who need additional support in order to fulfil their potential. This unit has contributed to the school's increasing success in reducing exclusions. The school uses a very wide range of external agencies to supplement its work to support vulnerable students and their families.

The headmaster is rightly respected by the school community and provides clear and purposeful leadership. He and his colleagues have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Strategies to involve students and their parents in school improvement have developed significantly since the last inspection and are beginning to have a positive impact on students' achievement. The school has benefited from good support from the local authority, for example through the incisive analysis provided by the school improvement partner and through help with strategies to support students who have speech and language difficulties and those who exhibit challenging behaviour. School leaders judge that they would benefit from support in further developing the quality of middle leadership.

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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

