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Mr N Spurdell
Headteacher
John O' Gaunt Technology College
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Dear Mr Spurdell,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 4 March 2010, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please do extend my sincere thanks to the staff and students I visited in lessons, and to members of the senior and middle leadership team and students whom I interviewed.

At the last inspection in 2007, the school was judged as satisfactory for its overall effectiveness and good for leadership and management, teaching and learning and curriculum. However, following inspection, outcomes for students in relation to achievement and standards significantly declined over the period 2007–2009 to well below national averages. The principal factors contributing to this downturn included instabilities in teaching and leadership staffing. The school was identified as a National Challenge School. Following the resignation of the headteacher, a new headteacher was appointed in April 2009. Subsequently, additional funds have been allocated to the school for a capital building programme. The local authority's School Improvement Partner/National Challenge Adviser has worked effectively with the headteacher and the senior leadership team. Through the Raising Achievement Plan, the school has focused on raising attainment of current Year 10 and 11 students, specifically targeting students who are at risk of not fulfilling their potential and disengaging from school life and their academic studies.

As a result of the inspection on 3 October 2007, the school was asked to:

- Undertake, effectively, the points outlined in the current three-year development plan.



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 capacity for sustained improvement.

The school's three-year development plan, scrutinised at the time of the last inspection, did not lead to improved student outcomes. Since his arrival, the current headteacher has effectively remodelled the school's strategic priorities in line with its context and produced a more robust plan and a more focused self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas it needs to improve. This is proving to be effective in improving outcomes for current Key Stage 4 students.

The school has introduced specific interventions for those Year 11 students who are underachieving, such as academic mentoring, one-to-one tutorials and motivational activities with senior leaders and subject specialists, in Key Stage 4. Along with these interventions, the school is developing a more appropriate curriculum, in Key Stage 4 and post-16, as BTEC and NVQ courses in sport, science, health and social care, travel and tourism, are offered across both key stages. In addition, students for whom it is appropriate undertake level one literacy and numeracy qualifications. Predictions for 2010 GCSE results indicate that the school is on track to meet its targets for attainment in English and mathematics, and will raise attainment to broadly national averages for both five A* to C GCSEs (including English and mathematics) and five A* to C GCSEs. The school rightly continues to prioritise effective actions for students who do not fulfil their academic potential based on their prior attainment; in particular, middle-band boys and girls. These groups have, historically, not attained the same levels of progress as their peers.

The school has made satisfactory progress in the tracking of students' progress. This is now much more rigorous and the school is investing in software that will enable senior leaders, working closely with middle managers, to track students in Years 7–9 much more closely. 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. 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 literacy and 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, but a number did not know what they needed to do to improve. Levels of persistent absence and attendance have now improved and are broadly within national averages.

Good teaching, especially in history and German, was observed jointly by the inspector and senior managers, and notably, developed higher-order thinking skills through effective opportunities for group work and for students to carry out self-evaluations and peer-assessments of their learning and progress. In some lessons,



the pace and timing of the assessment activities were too hurried and not all teachers checked what their students were learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers built on their good relations with students and fostered a productive learning environment. Marking of students' work is inconsistent and while there are some good examples of assessed work, teachers do not consistently ensure that students have redrafted or corrected their work before moving on to the next stage of learning. The school's learning support assistants have great potential, but are not all being deployed effectively during lessons, in developing students' independent learning skills and supporting students of lower ability.

The headteacher has been instrumental in changing the ethos and culture of the school and has created a whole-school focus on raising the achievement and aspirations of all students. Quality assurance processes are more thorough and senior leaders are committed to steering forward improvements in teaching and assessment. Managers are now aware that they need to focus more effectively on the learning and progress of all students, so as to sustain greater outcomes in achievement and attainment.

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

