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10 March 2011

Mr Struthers
Headteacher
Hylands School
Hatfield Grove
Chelmsford
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Dear Mr Struthers

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Hylands School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the students who gave up their lunch break to meet me.

Since January 2010 there have been changes to senior leadership and middle management teams and some long-term absences among this key group of staff. At the same time the school has been preparing for students to transfer from a closing neighbouring school, some of whom have already joined Key Stage 4. A substantial building project is due to start in the very near future.

As a result of the inspection on 18 January 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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.

Students' achievement remains satisfactory. The proportion of students who gained five good GCSE passes remained similar between 2009 and 2010, although this was against a backdrop of rising national standards. The proportion who gained five good passes including English and mathematics rose from 38% to 43%. Attainment remained below average, and although published data show that some students who achieved A* to B grades in their GCSEs made good progress against their starting points, progress overall declined. School data since September 2010 show that this trend has been reversed, and the students currently in Years 10 and 11 are on track to achieve better results. A new initiative to enter some students for examinations

September 2010



before the end of Year 11 has already met with success in English, information and communication technology (ICT) and statistics.

Inspectors observed a range of lessons across subjects and year groups. Most were satisfactory. The impact of school action could be seen in improved strands of teaching, for example in the use of varied resources to engage students' interest. The quality of verbal feedback and use of questioning to students was sometimes good. However, in many lessons the use of assessment fails to result in activities tailored to individual students' ability. The quality of feedback in marking is variable. The school has implemented a revised marking system but not all work is marked in this way. Students have opportunities in lessons to work in groups, in pairs and independently. However, the quality of guidance available to them in order to hone their independent learning skills is not yet consistently good. Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and have a shared understanding of good practice.

There has been a drive within the school to raise the profile and accountability of middle managers. Newly revised departmental self-evaluations ask probing questions and provide an appropriate framework for heads of department to bring together and analyse their data. The format is consistent and focuses on attainment and progress, the quality of teaching, and any gaps in achievement between male and female students. As a result of these evaluations, improvement plans have been devised to address key recommendations from the 2010 inspection report. Senior leaders have begun to assess how well they have been implemented but this is not yet complete. The school has made good progress in improving attendance. School data indicate that weekly attendance for class groups now fluctuates between average and high for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students. This considerable achievement is a result of rigorous monitoring and collective responsibility as well as through the role of the attendance officer.

The school's specialist science status provides a vehicle for partnership work with primary schools and community networks, for example by facilitating a course for local mothers to help them return to work. Rural studies are undertaken on the school's farm and provide an opportunity for diploma and alternative courses.

The school has received good quality integrated support from the local authority, from the School Improvement Partner and through Gaining Ground partnerships. Local authority support has been effectively focused on monitoring departmental needs and the quality of teaching overall.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lucie Calow
Additional Inspector

September 2010

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - making lessons consistently more interesting, imaginative and challenging
 - ensuring students receive regular feedback on how they may improve their work
 - providing students with more opportunity to work independently.

- Make leadership and management more effective by:
 - improving the clarity and accuracy of departmental self-evaluations
 - ensuring that plans to enhance the performance in departments are fully implemented.

- Improve the attendance of the small minority of students who are persistently absent by working closely with the new attendance officer and local partnerships.