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Thursday 14 October 2010

Mrs J Adamson  
Headteacher  
NCHS The Science College  
Ostend Place  
Newcastle  
Staffordshire  
ST5 2QY

Dear Mrs Adamson

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of NCHS The Science College**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school together with Trevor Riddiough HMI on Wednesday 13 October 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please also thank both governors, and the two groups of pupils that we met.

Since the previous inspection in July 2009, the school has formed a federation with Clayton Hall School, under the executive headteacher Mark Heuston. There is one Governing Body. Numbers on roll have remained stable over time.

As a result of the inspection on 8 July 2009, 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The GCSE results of 2009 remained well below average, and measures of progress were also very low despite predictions in the previous report of better outcomes. However, in 2010, provisional results at GCSE, were the best in the schools history, with 45% of pupils gaining five or more good grade GCSE's including English and mathematics, much better than the 22% of 2009. Overall standards rose, to just below national averages, and progress indicators now look to be at least satisfactory. The current Year 11 is on target for even higher results in 2011. These strongly rising standards are the result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum, and targeted support for individual pupils who look to be underachieving. The school now systematically tracks pupil progress, informs pupils and their parents regularly about how things

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are going, and ensures teachers have a better understanding of how their pupils are doing in comparison to other subjects.

During our visit, we observed eleven lessons; all were at least satisfactory with the majority being good or outstanding. The best learning occurred when pupils made brisk starts to lessons, responding to well-prepared materials that stimulated their thinking. In most lessons, pupils did have sufficient time to develop their own thinking and understanding independently, using the teacher as a source of advice and challenge. The school uses a standard lesson plan but this has some limitations, as it does not explicitly identify which particular pupils might be ready to tackle different levels of demand. Learning was slower, where pupils had to wait to contribute, or did not have opportunity to participate in class discussion. Marking quality varies between classes. The best examples demonstrate an accurate diagnosis of working level, clear feedback on what is needed to improve, and an expectation that pupils will respond to that advice. Other, albeit a minority, of examples were limited to perfunctory ticks, and repetition of advice to complete work, that was going unheeded by the pupils. Most pupils know their target grades, and, at least in core subjects, know what they need to do to achieve them. These details are clearly written in reports to parents, and available at parent consultation meetings.

The local authority had triggered a collaboration between NCHS and Clayton hall school in late 2008. That collaboration became a federation in the spring of 2010, bringing a shared sense of new opportunity and stability to the leadership and management of this school. The process of federation has been effectively managed, thanks to good governance from both predecessor schools, and good local authority and National Challenge adviser oversight. The new senior leadership has brought consistency of practice, robust monitoring and evaluation of teaching, in building a stronger capacity to improve. As one pupil put it, 'a clear set of rules that make for a much more enjoyable and consistent learning ethos across the school'. As yet, science specialism has not contributed significantly to school improvement. Progress towards developing a better provision for cultural and spiritual development of pupils has been limited so far. Further work on auditing what is already in place, and what the local needs of the school and its immediate community might be, is planned for this academic year. Pockets of good practice already exist, but pupils do yet have a good enough understanding of life in multicultural Britain.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Cartwright".

Brian Cartwright

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2009.**

- Raise standards and achievement further through improved consistency in the use of data for tracking students' progress and target setting so that all students know what they have to do to improve.
- Develop teachers' practice so that they are confident in allowing students opportunities for independent learning.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop their spiritual and cultural awareness to better prepare them for life in a multicultural society.