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Mr Stephen Bardon
Headteacher
Ryecroft CofE (C) Middle School
Denstone Road
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Uttoxeter
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Dear Mr Bardon

**Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour:
monitoring inspection of Ryecroft CofE (C) Middle School.**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school unannounced on 21 March 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the many pupils I spoke to and to the local authority officer who attended the feedback.

Since the previous inspection there have been reductions to teaching and support staffing structures, considerable changes to the learning environment both inside and outside, and a change to the school day. School leaders have addressed the financial position which has prevented a deficit budget.

As a result of the inspection on 16 November 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 good progress in making improvements and the effectiveness of the school in improving pupils' behaviour is good.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment in writing, reading and mathematics has improved since the previous inspection and is above average by the time they leave school in Year 8. Comprehensive moderation of pupils' work, which includes colleagues from partner middle schools, the local high school and the local authority, confirms the accuracy of the school's assessments. In addition, the school's data indicate that the overall progress current Year 8 pupils have made in English and mathematics during their four years at Ryecroft has improved on that of previous years and is good. These



improvements are the result of a combination of better teaching, more specific and tailored intervention for pupils who are struggling to master the basic skills, and the increasing opportunities which enable pupils to apply writing skills across the curriculum.

The quality of teaching

The school's own evidence confirms an improvement in the day-to-day quality of teaching that pupils experience. Good and satisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. In lessons, pupils are given more opportunities to work independently and, when this happens, they do so well as a result of positive attitudes and good behaviour. Pupils enjoy learning when they are given choices and can be actively involved; they say this happens more frequently. At times, however, there are missed opportunities for pupils to work together to share ideas or decide together what 'good' might look like in learning. Teachers use a range of resources to interest pupils and stimulate their thinking. There is a generally good level of challenge in lessons which is linked to teachers' increasingly effective use of assessment information when planning learning. The pace of learning is not always sufficiently brisk to ensure that all groups of pupils make rapid progress. Most pupils spoken to had an understanding of their next steps in learning and the marking of pupils' work in English is outstanding. However, in other subjects, there remains variation in how well teachers' written comments give pupils precise areas for improvement.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school has made good progress in improving pupils' behaviour from an already good starting point. This is clear over time, for example in the continued reduction in exclusions from school, which were already lower than national. Pupils understand, and have been involved in shaping, the school's code of conduct and the rewards and sanctions policies. There is a strong focus on understanding others' points of view and making sure that there is a good learning environment in lessons.

Pupils are happy to be at school, they feel safe and can give specific examples of when teachers and support staff have helped their wellbeing. The above average levels of attendance for all groups of pupils are a good indicator of this. Pupils also describe generally good behaviour in lessons, irrespective of the year group, subject or class teacher.

Around the site, the majority of pupils behave respectfully of each other and the school facilities. More opportunities in lessons for pupils to work independently have increased their ability to be self-managing learners. However, when learning is over-directed by the teacher, pupils have little option other than being passive learners. School leaders have a good handle on patterns of behaviour at different times of the school week and of different pupils. This increased tracking has led to more effective analysis which then results in decisive actions to increase positive behaviour. For



example, a change has been made to the timing of morning break which has resulted in fewer incidents of minor disruption.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

School leaders have continued their determined approach to improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, and their success is evident in the improved outcomes. Systematic monitoring and evaluation have enabled the headteacher to know the strengths in the quality of teaching and where this needs to be improved. Good-quality external and internal professional development has been well-managed by school leaders and is having a good impact on the quality of teaching. Challenges continue with regards to the staffing structure of a small school; leaders are using the resources available to them to good effect. Increased examples of the curriculum promoting pupils' literacy skills are having a good effect and this is an area in which school leaders are rightly developing further. The inspection findings endorse school leaders' plans to employ an additional English specialist to support further the development of pupils' English skills. The Governing Body's committee structure has been reorganised to increase its strategic approach to supporting and challenging school leaders, including in further improving pupils' behaviour.

The school is positive about the support from the local authority's education and welfare teams. The good impact of this is evident, for example, in the increasing opportunities for pupils to develop writing across the curriculum and in the school's work to support those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

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

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

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

- Raise attainment in writing by ensuring there is a strong focus on promoting literacy across the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment by:
 - ensuring teachers use assessment information to plan tasks of appropriate challenge for all the pupils in their classes
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to work independently in ways which they choose and in small groups
 - making sure pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work.

