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Mrs H Salmon  
The Headteacher  
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20 November 2006

Dear Mrs Salmon

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JAMES SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Christopher Russell HMI, John Carnaghan and Isobel Randall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 9 and 10 November 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed 29 lessons, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior managers, the chair of governors, groups of students, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

Since the last visit a new headteacher has been appointed who took up her post in September 2006. The senior management team is now up to full strength following the return of the deputy headteacher from a period of leave. An experienced additional deputy headteacher has also joined the

school on a temporary basis for one year to strengthen leadership in curriculum planning and in teaching.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement is inadequate and standards are below national expectations. Results for the 2006 national tests show an improvement in achievement and standards at Key Stage 3. The proportion of students who took the Key Stage 3 tests was also much greater than in 2005. Analysis of the 2006 results demonstrates that students in Year 9 made satisfactory progress in science and mathematics. There was a significant improvement in results in these subjects, with a marked rise in the proportion of students achieving the higher levels. Students made unsatisfactory progress in English where results were similar to 2005.

Key Stage 4 results fell slightly in 2006; although given their lower starting points, the progress made by students was similar to the previous year. As in 2005, students made insufficient progress and the proportion of students leaving Year 11 without a qualification was much greater than the national average.

### Personal development and well-being

The students' personal development and well-being have improved recently, and are now satisfactory.

Behaviour in lessons has improved since the last visit. Students now understand and accept the system of rewards and sanctions. On-call withdrawal from a lesson, temporary internal exclusion, and the work of the behaviour management unit contribute well to the improved behaviour in class and around the school. There has also been a fall in the number of students excluded. A significant number of students still do not demonstrate sufficient interest in their work. They lose concentration in lessons and make unsatisfactory progress in their learning. Students behave well around the school and are respectful of the accommodation. They enjoy coming to school and their attendance has improved. It is now close to the national average. Punctuality has improved, helped by the strict arrangements for monitoring students' arrival. Students report that bullying is rare and that teachers deal with any unacceptable incidents promptly.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- raise standards of behaviour so that all students are able to learn effectively – satisfactory.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent and remains unsatisfactory because there are too many inadequate lessons. There is effective teaching and a third of lessons seen were good. In these lessons, teachers insist that their high expectations of students' behaviour and performance are met. Such teaching maintains a clear focus on the lesson's learning objectives and reinforces gains made by summarising at the end of the lesson what students have learned. Students generally lack independent learning skills but where there is good teaching they are encouraged to give of their best and develop their own ideas.

In just over one fifth of lessons seen teaching and learning were unsatisfactory. Too few teachers demonstrate a real passion for their subject. Much teaching is pedestrian and fails to engage students' interest. This leads to low level disruption, such as too much talking or students calling out. In less effective lessons, teachers do not deal properly with these disturbances. This makes it difficult to maintain a good pace and students do not learn enough. Too frequently, teachers set the same work for all students. This often fails to stretch the more able or take sufficient account of the needs of those who have learning difficulties.

Academic guidance is poised to improve but is currently inadequate. The school has developed its assessment procedures to provide a comprehensive range of up-to-date information. This is increasingly used to inform parents and students about where improvements could be made. The recent academic review day was well attended by parents and was a good start to improving academic guidance. However, whilst there are pockets of good practice, there is inconsistent use of precise, subject-specific guidance to provide students with targets about how to reach the next level. This is, to some extent, compounded by inconsistent marking. Some teachers do offer helpful written guidance and encouragement, but many exercise books contain few comments. Without these regular checks, some students show little pride in the presentation of their work and several books have untidy writing.

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. The school has made improvements to the citizenship programme since the last monitoring visit. More time is now allocated in the curriculum and planning for the subject is secure. There has also been an increase in the number of students following vocational and applied courses at Key Stage 4. The school recognises that there is a need to develop the range of courses further to ensure that the curriculum fully meets the needs of all students. Managers have well thought out plans for the development of the curriculum. The school operates a good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. Students enjoy these opportunities and participation levels are high.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it reaches the quality that is typically found in other schools – inadequate.

### Leadership and management

The new headteacher provides strong leadership and has a clear focus on raising standards. Other senior leaders are successfully developing their roles to help them play a fuller part in monitoring the work of the school and tackling areas for improvement. The school has introduced strategies which have been successful in improving students' attendance and behaviour, which were areas of weakness. The leadership is now appropriately focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning and extending the curriculum. There are good plans in place for taking the school forward which are regularly reviewed. Some initiatives have only recently been introduced and have yet to demonstrate their effect on raising standards.

The school has improved its ability to monitor and evaluate its work. Appropriate systems to assess students' work and check their progress regularly have been put in place. Data is being used increasingly to analyse performance and set targets for improvement. There is a regular cycle established for monitoring teaching. The school's self-evaluation of the quality of teaching is higher than inspection evidence suggests. This is because in some of the school's observations there is insufficient focus on the gains students have made in their learning.

The school is developing its role as a specialist mathematics and computing college. The curriculum has been extended to include more use of information and communication technology (ICT) and a statistics course has been introduced in Year 10. The increased focus on mathematics and ICT is helping to improve the quality of teaching and has resulted in students gaining better results in national tests and examinations in these subjects.

Governors now provide satisfactory support for the school. They receive detailed information about the school's performance and have a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The governing body works closely with senior managers and has set up committees which provide oversight of different areas of the school's work.

The stronger leadership and more effective work of the governing body demonstrate that the school's capacity for further improvement has improved and is now satisfactory.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- secure leadership and management which effectively address the weaknesses in the school – satisfactory.

## External support

The local authority provides a good level of support. Link officers have continued to support the governing body in developing its role. The LA has worked closely with the school to develop the skills of senior leaders and is funding a deputy headteacher post for one year to strengthen management. Consultants for mathematics, English, science and behaviour management visit regularly and provide support for teachers. The LA has reviewed thoroughly aspects of the school's work identified for improvement and helped individual subject departments to evaluate their performance more effectively. An independent consultant has been engaged to help set up effective systems for using data.

## Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through providing more interesting and challenging lessons which capture students' interest.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Devon.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath  
H M Inspector