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Mr N Charlton
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Dear Mr Charlton

OFSTED MONITORING OF GRADE 3 SCHOOLS

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 22 February, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

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.

As a result of the inspection on 22 and 23 February 2006, the school was asked to:

- improve standards and achievement in the sixth form by setting challenging targets and monitoring progress regularly
- improve progress in science in Key Stage 3, for example, by providing more opportunities for practical and independent work
- continue to improve teaching and learning so that learners are engaged and well challenged in all lessons so that good progress is made, and the occasional unsatisfactory behaviour eliminated
- improve the fabric of the building where possible and resources for ICT in the sixth form and across the school so that learners and teachers can use these regularly to enhance learning in every subject
- improve students' opportunities for spiritual development.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that, at this time, the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement.

The school responded very quickly to the inspection report and put in place a comprehensive plan in respect of each of the areas for improvement. At the same time, senior managers instituted a new review and development

process to ensure that the action plan would be replaced in due time by an effective school improvement plan.

The sixth form is a joint one organised with the neighbouring girls' school. There is clear evidence that standards in the sixth form are rising, especially in the current Year 13. This is as a result of major improvements in the way the two branches of the sixth form work together. In particular, improved communications have led to much more effective monitoring of the students' work and personal development. Students' targets are regularly reviewed, and effective action is taken to ensure those at risk of underachieving are given appropriate support. The quality of teaching and learning has also improved through the development of more consistent practices by teachers from both schools.

Standards of attainment in science in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2006 were higher than those in 2005. Moreover, there is clear evidence that standards in the current Year 9 group are higher still, although they entered Key Stage 3 with lower overall standards than the preceding year. There have been changes in the curriculum that are providing more opportunities for practical and independent work, and the instability in staffing which has affected standards in recent years is now reduced. However, there are still some classes that receive less practical work than others, and there are shortcomings in the approach to scientific investigations as taught by some of the teachers.

The school has an effective continuing professional development programme which is designed to improve the quality of teaching. This includes a regular weekly session attended by all teachers. The latest evidence from the monitoring programme shows a sharp increase in the proportion of lessons that are good or better. A decrease in the number of 'call outs' for senior managers during lessons, and in the use of the school's internal exclusion system, indicate a decrease in incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour. There has also been demonstrable success in intervention programmes aimed at improving the learning of pupils at risk of underachieving.

The school, excepting the sports facilities, remains in a poor condition, with one major block requiring permanent scaffolding. Corridors and stairs are too narrow and many classrooms are unsuitable for reasons of size or design, including a number of ICT rooms. Given the restrictions on spending following a period of recovery from a large deficit budget, the school is doing as well as could be expected to maintain the fabric through a rolling programme aimed at priority areas. Similarly, it has done well to upgrade the ICT equipment so that it is now fully functional and provides well for ICT related subjects. The school has also planned wisely for future expansion as funds allow. It is considerably improved compared with provision at the time of the last inspection, but still has limited capacity to enhance learning in subjects across the curriculum.

Senior managers see the pupils' spiritual development as a key component in their personal development and well-being. The school has improved opportunities for spiritual development through its house assembly system and through curriculum enhancements. It has also embarked on a thorough audit of provision with the intention of introducing further improvements.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

John English
Additional Inspector