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Mr B Ellis
The Headteacher
Riverwalk School
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Dear Mr Ellis

Ofsted Monitoring of Grade 3 Schools

Thank you for the help which you, your staff, chair of governors and pupils gave when I inspected your school on 5 June, 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.

As a result of the inspection on 24 and 25 January 2006, the school was asked to improve assessment procedures to ensure that pupils' progress can be tracked effectively; extend target setting for pupils' achievements in order to raise expectations of what they will learn; analyse and use information from monitoring more effectively to contribute to raising standards and improve the provision for post-16 students to prepare them for when they leave school.

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 and in raising the pupils' achievements.

The school has successfully introduced a new common assessment system for the core areas of English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and personal social and health education. Teachers have worked effectively together to make sure they interpret assessment levels in the same way and this has enabled a reasonable level of consistency in teachers' assessments of pupils' work across the school. Teachers are becoming more adept at using information from assessments to focus teaching more precisely thus raising the expectations of pupils' achievement.

Teachers' increasing access to useful assessment data has effectively supported progress in extending target setting for pupils. There are clear whole school targets and individual pupil targets across the core curriculum areas. The clarity of assessment information has also supported staff in raising their expectations for different groups of pupils based on three broad bands of ability. The planning for three levels of ability across the school enables members of the staff team to help all pupils have a suitable understanding of what they are learning or the purpose of an activity. The school rightly began with a focus on the core subjects enabling staff to become familiar with new systems and raise their expectations. This work has not extended to other subjects across the curriculum and expectations often remain less ambitious in these subjects.

The frequency and rigour of monitoring has improved and has helped to keep a good focus on the agenda to raise standards. Detailed assessment data is still relatively new and there is not yet enough information to analyse progress over time. As a result, targets and perceptions of what constitutes good progress are still not consistent across the school. The senior team does make good use of tracking information to make sure pupils are learning as much as expected in relation to targets set this year. Any dips in achievement are identified and reasons behind these dips are discussed. This is beginning to lead to additional interventions for example, more focussed support to help improve pupils' progress. Governors have refined their roles and there is a clear strategy to involve them in the monitoring cycle. This has given them a much better understanding of the strengths of the school and of the areas requiring development. The improved knowledge about the school enables governors to offer constructive comments when prioritising development plans. The school development plan and self evaluation reflect improved analysis and identification of priority areas for development. However, the written success criteria in school plans are not always sufficiently focussed on the outcomes for pupils although there are some good examples, as seen in the evaluation of training and professional development for special support assistants. This has clearly helped to improve the quality of support and in turn the progress made by pupils.

There has been extremely good improvement in the provision for post-16 students at the school and as a result, students are now making good progress. The physical environment has been carefully adapted to provide a clear distinction between the 14 – 19 department and the rest of the school. Resources and the environment reinforce the perception of students moving on and into adulthood. This physical distinction is further supported by a carefully planned curriculum that builds upon the post-16 students' interests and abilities. Work modules accredited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) are designed to meet individual needs and work within the modules is completed within an individualised timetable. They effectively build upon previous learning from Key Stage 4 and

students are rightly proud of their achievements and recognise their own successes. The curriculum successfully prepares students for their future lives and helps them learn a relevant level of independence. It enables them to have access to a wide range of external social and recreational facilities.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector