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Mrs P Sargent
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sargent

Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and the students gave me when I inspected your school on 20 June 2007, 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 9 and 10 October 2006, the school was asked to improve the consistency and quality of teaching to make learning more engaging, to improve standards and achievement by making better use of assessment information in planning the next steps in students' learning, and, to further improve attendance.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievements.

Improvements in lesson monitoring have raised the quality of teaching and learning by sharing and developing best practice, although there remains some way to go to secure consistently good teaching and learning. The outcomes of monitoring are used well to target guidance to individual teachers and whole-school training provided by school and local authority personnel. Evidence of the school's growing capacity to improve teaching includes the innovative use of strong teachers to coach their colleagues. Staffing difficulties, most notably in science, have hindered the development of consistently strong teaching. Most lessons are planned around clear learning objectives which are communicated well to students at the start. Interactive whiteboards make a good contribution to the delivery of key information and to the structuring of lessons. Where teachers use short, engaging tasks which enable both them and the students to assess the progress being made, the pace of learning is good. Students respond well to practical learning and to the growing number of lessons where literacy skills are developed through structured speaking, listening and writing activities. However, a minority of teachers still use ineffective techniques,

such as lengthy explanations of concepts which do not enable students of differing abilities to access learning. These lessons continue to trigger restlessness in those students who find it difficult to manage their behaviour, and poor engagement among those who are less motivated. However, the reduced proportion of such lessons, together with initiatives like the appointment of behaviour assistants, means behaviour is improving and that learning is not derailed by bad behaviour. Positive relationships between teachers and most students contribute to learning, although there are some inconsistencies in the way teachers respond to misbehaviour.

Efforts to raise standards by making better use of existing assessment information to plan the next steps in students' learning have been effective and there are good plans for an overhauled assessment system for September. The school's most recent analysis of assessment data shows students are doing better, although they are hampered by the legacy of slow progress in the past. The improvements arise from more regular assessment of students' progress and better use of this data to plan lessons, set individual targets, and identify underachievement. Most students know their target levels or grades. Increasing numbers know how to reach them because subjects are starting to record, with students, both the progress made and the areas to focus on next. Nevertheless, the extent and impact of this work vary considerably between subjects and are disrupted by the lack of continuity in teaching in some areas. Lessons offer more opportunities for students to reflect on their progress towards lesson objectives and personal targets. A feature of the best lessons is teachers' modelling of the assessment process. Less able students have a weaker understanding of how to use assessment to improve their learning because teachers too often tell them how to improve rather than involving them more in the process. Marking is regular. However, guidance for development varies widely in usefulness.

The actions to improve attendance are well focused. Good coordination between school staff and external agencies enables support to be targeted appropriately for individuals, groups of students and parents. Although there was a fall in attendance in the spring term, data for this term shows steady improvement.

The local authority is committed to the school, provides a wide range of support, and monitors the impact well. Particular strengths are in supporting aspects of leadership and management such as monitoring teaching and learning, including through part funding a consultant headteacher, and in helping to improve attendance. Work to raise standards has made a satisfactory impact overall, although there are areas, for example in mathematics, where improvement is slower.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector