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Mr C Richardson
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Dear Mr Richardson

Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 May, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Particular thanks to Christina and Paul who provided my initial introduction; they were marvellous ambassadors for the school. During my visit, staff and pupils displayed an immense pride in the school's many achievements. At the time of the monitoring visit, Year 10 pupils were involved in work experience and Year 11 pupils were beginning their examination period.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 9 and 10 October 2006, the school was asked to improve pupils' achievement by raising standards, to improve pupils' attendance to at least satisfactory levels, and to ensure that evaluation of the school's strategies for improvement focuses more closely upon their impact on the learning and achievement of all pupils.

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

The school is optimistic about the 2007 examination and test results, and predicts significant improvement at all levels. At Key Stage 3 the school expects to meet the school target in science and to exceed it in English and mathematics. Sensible strategies have been introduced to help pupils in Year 9 who have been identified as underperforming in English or mathematics. The school predicts that the headline figures at GCSE will also improve and for most, they will be above the school's own targets and in line with those suggested by data from the Fischer Family Trust. Particularly pleasing is the indication that very few pupils will leave Cockburn this year with no qualifications. The school is data rich and a group of middle managers

use this data effectively to monitor performance at year group, class set and individual pupil level and they work with form tutors, heads of department and subject teachers to support groups and individual pupils.

The curriculum has been adapted and there are clear routes and pathways through both key stages which are tailored to the needs of the individual pupils. Good links with a local school and college provide additional vocational courses and the school has introduced suitable certificated courses, including on-line literacy and numeracy tests which provide rapid feedback of success to pupils.

Good progress has been made in improving attendance, which is now at a level above the target set by the DfES. Comparison of attendance for the last and the current academic years shows a 2.4% increase overall. Attendance at Key Stage 4 continues to be lower than at Key Stage 3; the school is aware of this and is working on specific initiatives to counter this trend. The organisation and management of the comprehensive range of mechanisms to support and encourage improved attendance are exceptional: careful tracking and identification are complemented by appropriate strategies to engage pupils in education; outreach workers link with families and the wider community; and the curriculum is well matched to the needs of the pupils. Consistent approaches to counter persistent absenteeism have led to a 7% drop in this kind of absence pattern.

Developments in the specialist performing arts have had a positive impact on the school; more pupils are studying examination courses and there is an extensive extra-curricular programme. Achievement targets in both key stages were met in 2006 and the school anticipates exceeding the targets in 2007. Specialist days and theme weeks are enhanced by school performances. The wider community is engaged with the school and there are effective links with The Royal Armouries, Leeds University and Park Lane College. The performance arts skills are being developed across the school to improve teaching and learning – the tremendous work on a project which saw a re-enactment of the Battle of the Somme last year was a joint venture with the history department and plans are well advanced to develop arts-based projects related to slavery and a forensic science project for gifted and talented pupils. Pupils value this aspect of the school's work and speak with pride about the courses on offer and the performances.

Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory and are often good. Lesson planning is secure and clear learning objectives are reviewed effectively through the lesson. The occasional low-level disruption is dealt with efficiently and sensibly. The majority of pupils are well motivated and work hard and many enjoy the various learning activities during the lesson. Work in exercise books does not always reflect the quality of the teaching and, in some, feedback to the pupils about their work and recorded assessment in terms of grades or levels is minimal.

Leadership and management at senior and middle level are good. The leadership team is well developed and areas of responsibility are clear. There is great energy and enthusiasm in the team and this is reflected in the high morale of the staff.

Leaders regularly monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and they have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This evaluation has led to a revision of the school improvement plan and the self-evaluation form, which have been streamlined and now provide a clear focus for further improvement.

The school values the work of the local authority's link officer who works with the school to broker appropriate support. The local authority's statement of action requires revision in order to better reflect the actions which will lead to continued progress.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school and I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ann Talboys
Her Majesty's Inspector