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Mrs Ruth Allen
Headteacher
Reading Girls' School
Northumberland Avenue
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Dear Mrs Allen

Ofsted Monitoring of Grade 3 Schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 July 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass my thanks to the staff, the governors, and the local authority representative who met with me.

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 27 and 28 June 2006, the school was asked to look at the following areas of concern in order to raise standards: sustain improvements in the quality of teaching and learning through continued monitoring and evaluation at all levels; ensure students continue to take greater pride in their work and develop independent learning habits; monitor rigorously well-judged changes to provision within the sixth form.

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 2006 GCSE results showed a marked improvement on those of previous years. The proportion of the students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, matched the national figures. Students achieved satisfactorily overall during their time in the school and achieved well in English and mathematics. Students' attainment at Year 9, in 2006, was average when all three core subjects are taken together. However, this masks their above average performance in English and below average performance in mathematics and science. Nevertheless, from their starting points on joining the school these students made rapid overall progress. The school's careful analysis of pupils' current progress indicates that the 2007 examination results are set to rise still further, despite Year 11 numbers increasing, by around a fifth, with new arrivals at the early stages of learning English. Provisional test results at the end of Year 9 clearly reflect this improvement with close to 80 per cent of the students gaining Level 5 or better in

mathematics and three-quarters in science. Post-16 results in vocational courses have also improved significantly.

Much of this improvement in the pupils' rate of progress has come about because of the strong focus on developing and strengthening classroom practice. The school has raised the percentage of good teaching to 70 per cent of lessons, well above that found at the 2006 inspection. Rigorous lesson observations and training for staff and students in evaluating learning in lessons underpin this progress. Evaluations of lessons seen during the monitoring inspection match closely those of senior managers and confirm the mainly good teaching and learning. Running parallel to the efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning has been the drive to fuel the students' sense of pride in their school. Refurbishments and improvements in displays, as well as designation as a specialist business and enterprise college, have helped raise the students' self-esteem. They now feel part of the school and are eager to share their views with staff and visitors alike. Students report a much enhanced voice for the school council. The sharp rise in their academic aspirations is reflected in the generally good presentation of their work and, above all, in their improved examination results. Coursework has also improved, reflecting students' greater independence in learning. Progress on improving the quality of teaching and learning and on encouraging students' greater pride in their work is good.

Within the limits of local planning opportunities, the school has made good progress in sustaining improvements in the sixth form. A collaborative project with another local school, in partnership with the local college, is providing a far wider range of curricular opportunities for the school's post-16 students. This widens access to both vocational and academic routes as well as encouraging students to remain in the school. This is already reflected in the numbers intending to return to Year 13. Under-subscribed courses have been withdrawn or shared with another institution so that the sixth form is more cost effective.

The local authority (LA) has provided good support for the school, both through the federation and through consultants working closely with the school on sharply focused areas for improvement. This support has underpinned the good developments brought about by the collaborative working of the senior team and the increasing accountability of middle managers.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Education and Children's services for Reading.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Nolan, Additional Inspector