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The Headteacher
Derwent Community School
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Dear Mrs Glaze

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 12 July 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the pupils and to your chair of governors for the time he gave.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 7 and 8 December 2006, the school was asked to: raise standards at Key Stage 1 and 2 by increasing the number of lessons in which teaching and learning are at least good; use the improved knowledge the school has about the levels at which pupils are working to provide good challenge to all pupils in every lesson; and evaluate the effect of new initiatives on pupils' achievement with greater urgency.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievements. There is still significant work to be undertaken before the school could be judged to provide an adequate education for its pupils.

Since the last inspection, the school has gone through a turbulent period during which 3 teachers have taken voluntary redundancies to take account of the school's falling roll over time. Although the school had hoped to appoint a new deputy for September it failed to recruit a candidate which it judged to be sufficiently strong for the post. At present the school is without a deputy or assistant headteacher for the autumn term. The local authority (LA) is attempting to find additional temporary personnel to support the school. This is essential and urgent if the school is to be enabled to have the capacity necessary to address the significant underachievement which persists.

The proportion of pupils who attained the nationally expected level at the end of Year 2 declined significantly this year compared to results in 2006. Nevertheless, given the pupils' starting points their progress was satisfactory which represents improvement since the last inspection. However, attainment in Key Stage 2 tests was significantly below the school's targets in English and mathematics and represents a significant decline in standards. Overall the pupils made less progress than last year's Year 6 had by the time they left the school. The school's data shows that significant proportions of pupils in Key Stage 2 classes have not made progress this academic year and in some cases they have regressed. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities remains a concern and a high priority for the school.

Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection but the nucleus of teachers who remain face a significant challenge if they are to establish consistently good teaching in order to address the legacy of uneven and under achievement. Teaching observed during the monitoring visit was never less than satisfactory. It was most productive when it enabled the pupils to be active, take the initiative and use helpful resources to clarify their understanding. Teaching assistants made a strong contribution to the pupils' learning and their positive attitudes. The pupils' chances of improving their attainment have been enhanced by the significant improvements in their rates of attendance and the good work of the nurture group which has helped some pupils to manage their own behaviour better. However, the quality of teaching remains too variable to secure the improvements in the rates of progress necessary to enable pupils to leave the school having achieved satisfactorily given their starting points. Planning does not consistently address the needs of different groups of pupils and so provide sufficient challenge. Opportunities are missed in some lessons to use resources which would help the pupils in their learning, for example, when they are trying to make calculations related to money. The quality of learning objectives is too variable and results in some lessons lacking sufficient focus on the skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils should be acquiring. Pupils are given too little scope to prove what they have already learnt or to decide for themselves how they might tackle work. Marking does not sufficiently help pupils to identify what are the next steps to improve their learning.

The school is candid in its awareness of weaknesses. The headteacher is committed to providing pupils with a high quality of education based upon challenge as well as support. Her own contribution to the teaching of Year 6 in the latter half of the year improved the rate of progress of pupils in reading and mathematics. However, although the school is beginning to develop the skills of middle leaders, significant gaps in personnel place a heavy burden on the headteacher and inevitably impede the school's rate of progress. The school has thorough systems to hold staff to account but these have yet to have sufficient impact on the progress pupils are making. The monitoring of teaching is becoming more rigorous and teachers have clear points for action which are then subsequently monitored. Most teachers who have received specific support have improved. Teachers meet regularly with an agenda focused upon the priorities for improvement. These have contributed to

better teaching and higher expectations. Governors are developing a well informed picture of the school's performance, for example, through "adopting" a class so that they can see how pupils are getting on over time.

The LA has provided useful support recently, for example to improve the quality of mathematics teaching and the monitoring of the progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their work is beginning to have an impact but much remains to be done. Additionally the need to address the capacity of the school's leadership has not been addressed with sufficient urgency and this continues to impede the school's planning for the next academic year.

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

Yours sincerely

David Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector