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Mr David Henderson
The Headteacher
Abbotsfield School
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Dear Mr Henderson

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 December 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to members of your staff, the chair of governors, pupils and local authority representatives who spoke with me during the day.

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 in March 2007, the school was asked to make improvements in four key areas. These were to: improve achievement and standards, particularly in English; agree a plan with the local authority to remove the deficit budget whilst ensuring that the school is able to provide a good standard of education; strengthen tracking procedures so that timely support can be provided; and ensure middle managers carry out their role effectively.

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' achievement.

Since the school was last inspected, performance in national tests, particularly GCSE results, indicates good progress in raising standards and achievement. While the full analysis has yet to be completed, available data indicates that, although still below the national average, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSE A*-C increased from 28% in 2006 to 57% in 2007. When English and mathematics are included, the percentage also rose significantly from 21% to 40%. However, standards in some subjects, such as information and communication technology are low. The school, with support from the local authority, are taking the necessary steps

to address this. The school's data tracking indicates that the gains made in 2007 will be sustained with further improvements expected in 2008.

Key Stage 3 tests in 2007 also show improvements in the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards for English, mathematics and science. Attainment in science was slightly below average, while standards in mathematics are above local and national averages. Standards in English have improved on 2006 but are still below average. Achievement from Years 7 to 11 has also improved, with particular strengths in mathematics. Progress is less marked at Key Stage 3, although local authority figures indicate that the school is adding value.

Good progress is a direct result of the priority being given to improving the quality of learning and the challenge provided for pupils in lessons, and better tracking of their achievement. Managers are more rigorous and systematic in monitoring teaching and learning and have been helped by good external support. Teaching and learning remain satisfactory, although they are improving. Strengths can be seen, for instance, in the improved consistency of planning and classroom management skills. Middle managers work collaboratively to share good practice throughout the school. Pupils spoke well of the changes and indicated that they liked the expectation of coming to lessons 'ready to learn'. They also commented favourably on 'what went well' and 'even better if' marking comments provided by teachers on their work.

The last inspection identified budget management as a concern. The local authority withdrew financial delegation from the governors in January 2007 and since then a recovery plan has been put in place. Savings are being made in this financial year without a significantly adverse impact on educational provision or staff morale. While there have been some reduction in staffing, changes have resulted in new appointments which are already adding strength to the school. The school is now exercising more prudent management of its annual budget. However the longer term plan to reduce the budget deficit completely remains unclear.

The staff now are more equipped to draw on a wealth of individual pupil data to assess progress. Increasingly they are using this to match teaching to learners' needs, plan earlier interventions and help pupils know what steps they need to take to improve. Information, for example, linking attendance with achievement is also shared regularly with parents. The school recognises that more needs to be done to ensure that this information is used consistently in lessons to support and stretch all levels of ability.

Recent staff changes have strengthened middle leadership and management. Middle managers have become more accountable and responsible for achievement and standards in their own areas and they provide clear direction for others to raise standards. Evaluation at departmental levels and the recording of impact against success criteria are developing well although are not yet rigorous enough. Middle managers work well together and provide good support to the headteacher and senior leaders. They have a common determination to succeed. They share good practice across curriculum areas; for instance, applying successful strategies from

mathematics to improve progress in English. However, more could to be done to strengthen the development of literacy across the curriculum.

Your effective leadership, with good support from senior and middle leaders, underpins the good progress being made. The other significant contributory factor is the positive impact of local authority and other external support. A comprehensive range of effective support, carefully tailored to meet needs has contributed to the progress being made, for example in English. Increasingly, and as the school continues to improve, the extent of this support is reducing.

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

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector