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Mr S Clark
The Headteacher
The George Ward School
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Dear Mr Clark

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 November 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussion, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I very much appreciated the warm welcome that I received and enjoyed my discussions with staff, students and the chair of governors. Please pass my thanks to everyone.

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 8 and 9 November 2006, when behaviour was judged unsatisfactory, the school was asked to ensure that procedures to deal with unacceptable attitudes and behaviour are consistently applied so that there is no disruption to students' learning. This was the major focus of this monitoring inspection. Progress in the two other points for improvement was not evaluated. These points asked the school to widen the range of vocational courses and improve the consistency of academic advice and support.

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

There have been considerable improvements in behaviour in the first few months of this school year. There were very high rates of exclusion throughout the last school year. Exclusion rates in the first few months of this school year have dropped to reasonable levels. The need to remove students from normal lessons is also reducing.

Students report that the school is a much calmer place now. They believe that everyone knows what consequences will follow if they flout the school's code of conduct. They say that staff do implement the procedures and deal with any

unsatisfactory behaviour calmly. Students were behaving well and there was a positive climate for learning in most lessons during the monitoring inspection.

Achievement at Year 9 has been broadly satisfactory in the last three years. At Year 11, however, there has been no secure upward trend in GCSE results. The achievement of the Year 11 students in 2007 was barely satisfactory and standards were well below average. This cohort had a sizeable group of non attenders and the completion of some GCSE coursework was disrupted by unusually high rates of staff absence.

In the first few months of this year, there have been no major concerns about staffing or students' attendance. The school is providing different pathways for students in Year 10. They can choose practical training and vocational courses that interest them. These are offered at school and at a number of other places as well. The attendance of students at off site courses or training is being carefully monitored. The school's assessments indicate that the current Year 9 and Year 11 students are making satisfactory progress.

Senior leaders have sensibly reviewed the school's management strategies to help them address the backlog of underachievement better. Rightly, checking students' progress regularly has become a top priority. Each individual student's performance is now reviewed by senior staff each term. Any specific concerns about underachievement are noted and next steps planned. The school has a thoughtful range of intervention strategies to improve literacy skills and to help students with behavioural difficulties to manage their behaviour better.

The spotlight is also on teaching and learning. A team of teachers discuss good practice and model this for others. Many teachers are teaching a new course to their tutor groups that is intended to improve the students' skills as learners and their standards in literacy.

The student council plays an active part in school life. For example, its members greatly enjoyed the recent 'takeover' day when they worked alongside members of staff and learnt what their jobs entailed. They suggested the rewards system and are reviewing how well this is working.

The school's development plan covers relevant projects for this school year and has numerous success criteria. It would help governors and staff if a few informative success criteria were picked out to be evaluated each term. This would help them to see whether new initiatives are making a difference and, very importantly, check whether the recent improvements in behaviour are sustained and students achieve satisfactorily over time.

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

Yours sincerely

Brenda Cusdin
Her Majesty's Inspector