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31 January 2008

Ms B Minette
The Headteacher
Wishmore Cross School
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Dear Ms Minette

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave myself and Susan Kara HMI, when we inspected your school on 24 January 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Please pass on our thanks to members of your staff, the chair of governors, pupils, and local authority and health representatives who spoke with us 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 April 2007, the school was asked to make improvements in three key areas. These were to: reduce unacceptable behaviour and bullying and raise attendance levels; iron out inconsistencies in teaching and raise the quality to that of the best; and ensure that staff deal with unacceptable behaviour in a consistent way.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Since the last inspection, a number of staffing changes have been made, including the appointment of an acting headteacher in September 2007. The increasingly effective and charismatic leadership of the acting headteacher, with support from senior leaders and the interim manager is bringing about improvement. Its impact can be seen, for example, in the greater empowerment of staff, building their capacity to bring about change and increasing accountability for their performance.

Since the last inspection, performance in Year 9 national tests indicates that a number of pupils reached average or above average standards in some subjects. This represents satisfactory progress, given their particular contexts. However, pupils made unsatisfactory progress at the end of Year 11. None achieved a higher level GCSE and only two pupils achieved grade D in science. This represented unsatisfactory achievement. Overall, pupils did not make the progress they should. The school has introduced changes to curriculum provision to make it more relevant and flexible. As a result, pupils are now more engaged in their learning. Current information indicates that they are all expected to leave school with at least one qualification at the end of Year 11. A number of pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 are potentially high achievers and the school is targeting support to enable them to achieve as well as they can. However, assessment is not yet sufficiently rigorous or consistent enough to enable staff to make secure judgements about levels of progress or help all pupils see how well they are doing.

Improved outcomes can be seen in pupils' attendance during the autumn term 2007 when compared with the same time in 2006. This is as a result of more effective steps the school is taking to follow up absence. Improved partnerships with parents and a more relevant curriculum are also contributory factors. However, recording of attendance is not sufficiently well linked with pupils' individual behaviour targets.

Inadequate behaviour continues to have a significant impact on teaching and learning. Pupils' behaviour dipped to a further low after the last inspection. However, since November, improvements have been made in the management of behaviour and this is starting to have impact. Behaviour has also been improved by changes made to the school environment and increased involvement with parents through, for example, reintegration meetings. The school's behaviour policy is being reviewed and an effective system for incentives has been introduced. The staff, despite some continued inconsistencies, are now in control of behaviour because clear expectations regarding behaviour management are being set by managers. The school is calmer and more focused than when last inspected. Outcomes can also be seen in reduced exclusions and vandalism. Nevertheless, too much verbal and physical behaviour remains challenging and this is manifested, for example, in outbursts inside and outside of lessons.

A key development since the last inspection has been the priority given to teaching and learning. More formalised support for teachers, regular monitoring of lessons and increased accountability are bringing about improvement. This can be seen, for example, in better lesson planning. Learning support assistants provide good support, although their role is not spelt out clearly enough. Staff do not yet use assessment information sufficiently well to inform planning to meet individual pupil's needs. Some teaching is good and most of it is at least satisfactory. However, a significant proportion of teaching and learning remains inadequate in some subject areas. Even in better lessons, the poor behaviour by some pupils means that they, and others, achieve too little in the time available. Managers are resolute in their determination bring about change and to eradicate lessons where inadequate progress is being made. They are confident that a more relevant and personal

curriculum, consistent behaviour management and effective holding of teachers to account will bring about this improvement. Early signs indicate that this confidence is well placed.

The local authority, through its additional support and intervention programme, is providing good support. It is confident in the leadership and management of the school. Other support, such as that provided by the child and adolescent mental health service, is effective and valued highly by the school. Staff morale is high and they share a determination to work together to bring about change. School leaders rightly acknowledge that the pace of progress needs to be consolidated and accelerated in order to bring about the required improvements identified at the last inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Kennedy".

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector