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Mr J Keeble
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Keeble

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 4 March 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am also grateful to representatives of the local authority and governing body for their time, and to the pupils who came to talk to me for their help.

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 February 2007, the school was asked to:

- Raise the standards of students' attainment, especially in English and mathematics.
- Improve the quality and range of teaching and learning in lessons to increase students' interest and accelerate their progress.
- Ensure compliance with current government legislation for safeguarding children.
- Improve attendance.
- Improve the consistency in the quality of leadership and management of middle leaders.

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.

Results from 2007 examinations show standards have risen significantly although targets were not met in English in the end of Year 9 national tests, nor in terms of the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C. Pupils in Year 11 made better progress during their time in school than was the case in the

previous year, especially in English and mathematics. However, they made more rapid progress in Key Stage 3 than in their final two years in school and lower ability girls did not do well enough. There was a notable increase in the percentage of pupils getting at least five higher grade GCSE passes and all pupils gained at least one GCSE pass or equivalent. The more able pupils, those with statements of educational need and those who joined the school with limited English did relatively well. The school now has very detailed and easily accessible data on pupils' performance and has identified areas of past weakness such as drama, boys' physical education and girls' technology, putting in place suitable strategies to improve results. It is confident of a further significant rise in GCSE results this summer. The strong performance in the end of Year 9 tests in 2007 augurs well for the future. Pupils' rates of progress increased in all three core subjects, putting the school in the top 20% of schools nationally for helping pupils to achieve at Key Stage 3.

This encouraging progress is the result of better lessons and pupils getting regular and detailed information about the level of their performance in each subject, with targets for improvement. Pupils talk enthusiastically about many lessons being more interesting and classroom behaviour improving as a result. Good relationships and a shared determination to succeed are evident in many classrooms. Extensive training and coaching have helped most teachers see the value and importance of discussion and group work and the need for pupils to be actively involved in their own learning. Question and answer sessions are brisk, although open questioning to encourage pupils to explore new ideas is limited. More teachers are willing to try new methods or to learn from each other. A minority, however, still explain things at too great a length and fail to excite pupils' curiosity. Marking has improved but its quality is far too variable and the amount and quality of homework set is inconsistent. The regular checking of the quality of lessons that occurs is useful, but the school is over-optimistic about the proportion of good teaching which takes place. This is because it focuses too much on how hard teachers work in lessons rather than how effective they are in getting pupils to learn.

Much work has been done to help middle managers play a greater part in school improvement. Achievement coordinators and heads of department get the information they need to check on what is working well and what needs attention. They feel better informed, more involved and clearer about the expectations placed on them. They value regular agenda items on attendance and pupils' progress and the frequent meetings they have with line managers to discuss the performance of their areas. Action plans are to a common format and are regularly reviewed. Consistency has been achieved and strategies are clear but this has been at a price. Planning and evaluation are systematic but limit the ability of individual departments to follow issues relevant to them alone. There is also an assumption that time spent on an issue means that it has successfully been dealt with.

There has been a concerted effort to reduce pupil absence. Attendance continues to improve and it now matches the national average. The initiative has high status: notice boards, assemblies, form time and newsletters are all used to celebrate improvements and create an atmosphere of competition and reward. Persistent absentees, too, have been successfully targeted and their number significantly reduced. Most importantly of all, pupils now understand the close link between

regular attendance and success at school. A concern raised about some safeguarding issues twelve months ago has been dealt with. Prompt and effective steps have been taken so that all safeguarding requirements are fully met.

The local authority has provided frequent and valuable advice and support and has been particularly effective in guiding the school towards finding solutions to specific issues rather than offering it general advice. The governing body has willingly taken on a more active and critical role, responding well to encouragement from both the headteacher and the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Jon Lövgreen
Additional Inspector