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Mrs N Mason
The Headteacher
The Orchard School
Cambridge Road
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Dear Mrs Mason

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 29 April 2008, 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 the colleagues and pupils who met me and to your chair of governors.

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 4 July 2007, the school was asked to:

- always provide pupils with challenging and interesting activities that raise the quality of their learning
- improve pupils' attendance and ensure consistent staff expectations of their behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school
- implement procedures for assessing pupils' work accurately and share this information with them to show what they need to do in order to improve
- analyse assessment data to ensure that all pupils and groups of pupils are achieving as well as they can.

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.

The school continues to undergo a period of change, affected in no small way by the extensive building work taking place whilst a new school is being created on the existing site. It is a credit to headteacher's leadership, and that of her team, that progress is being made in these difficult circumstances.

Good systems have been developed to monitor and improve the quality of teaching. Senior leaders have a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses and are taking

appropriately rigorous action to secure improvement. This has addressed to some extent a legacy of poor and inadequate teaching so that lessons are increasingly engaging and include more interesting and challenging activities. However, a small but significant proportion still make use of paper based exercises which are not well enough matched to pupils' aptitudes, abilities or reading skills, and this impacts upon pupils' responses. As the pupils themselves say, 'Behaviour is better in the lessons that are interesting.'

Behaviour around the school, whilst still occasionally volatile, is affected significantly by improved and positive behaviour management strategies. These are employed with increasing consistency by staff whose expectations are tempered with realism. Social skills are given a high priority and pupils themselves will remind one another, for example, to listen to what each other is saying and not interrupt.

The school has worked hard to engage parents, carers and other agencies to address attendance issues. Whilst it is finding it hard to raise overall attendance levels, partly due to agreed part time placements, it can demonstrate an encouraging drop in unauthorised absence. One pupil described how he used to attend for only two days a week but now comes every day, responding well to the flexible and college linked timetable which the school now offers. When in school, pupils attend lessons with increased regularity and there is less disruption in class.

Much work has been done to raise teachers' understanding of curriculum levels and encourage more accurate assessment of these for each pupil. The newly introduced system of termly assessing and reporting has provided a framework against which reasons for each pupil's progress, or lack of progress, can be questioned. Some staff speak positively about the use of assessment and tracking to inform their teaching and, in the lessons where it is used consistently, the jointly agreed marking policy provides effective guidance for pupils about what they can do to improve their work on a day by day basis. However, there is, as yet, no commonly shared understanding of what constitutes good progress in the longer term and, as a result, teacher expectation is variable. The school is aware that now recording and tracking systems are in place better use must be made of them to ensure that all pupils are set suitably challenging targets to achieve as well as they can.

The local authority is providing suitable support in order to fulfil its statement of action and the School Improvement Partner is working effectively with a senior leadership team which very much wants to make its own mark. Some recent changes to, and training for, the governing body have helped it to provide challenge as well as support. Members appreciate the need to increase their interrogation of pupils' standards and achievement if they are to further enhance the school's capacity to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy
Her Majesty's Inspector