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Mr Mario Citro
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Citro

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 26 March 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Could you also thank the chair and vice-chair of governors as well as the students for their contributions?

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 6 and 7 February 2007, the school was asked to:

- ensure that the curriculum and other activities better match the range of needs and interests of all learners
- raise standards in English and mathematics so that students are well prepared for their future employment
- ensure that the PSHE programme covers all aspects of personal development and well-being.

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 students' achievement.

A clear direction from senior leaders has enabled the school to implement many strategies to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Effective changes to the curriculum in Years 7 to 11 have resulted in an increased breadth of provision. In Year 7, students now undertake a project based curriculum, which integrates the subjects of mathematics, geography and history and is enabling them to develop their independent learning skills. The introduction of a 'learning to learn' curriculum for students identified with additional educational needs, including profound and moderate learning difficulties, improves their access to the Key Stage 3 curriculum by providing support for literacy and other specific needs. Choices available to students at the end of Year 9 have greatly improved. In partnership with

other local institutions, the school provides a good range of appropriate pathways where students can elect subjects or programmes that include work based learning and apprenticeships. The literacy strategy, which has been recently introduced into most year groups, is yet to have an impact on the standards of literacy in lessons.

In 2007, the school directed its attention to raising standards at Key Stage 4, which resulted in a rise in the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades in GCSE examinations. Between 2004 and 2006, students' attainment was significantly below the national average; the dramatic rise in 2007 has brought the school nearer to the national level. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including mathematics and English has shown a slight improvement, although this remains significantly below the national average. Leaders have identified intervention strategies to improve standards in both these subjects. Early examination entry in GCSE English has enabled the school to target more closely underachieving students or to allocate more time for students to attain GCSE mathematics. The school's data for 2008 indicates that students' attainment at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is set to rise further, and the school is set to achieve its challenging targets. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades at A* to G has improved and is now significantly above the national average. The progress students make by the end of Key Stage 4 significantly improved in 2007, and is now good. In 2007, Key Stage 3 results did not improve on the previous year. The school is now testing students earlier in Year 9, and is providing a range of support programmes for those who are underachieving.

The progress the school has made to improve the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is satisfactory; it now covers all aspects of personal development and well-being. All students have a lesson covering religious education, PSHE and citizenship. The programme meets statutory requirements and is enhanced by a good range of extra-curricular provision and visits to enhance students' social and cultural development. As a result, students are aware of leading safe and healthy lifestyles. Many, but not all, participate in sport. They enjoy school and make good progress by the end of Key Stage 4. The school provides a good range of opportunities for all students to make a positive contribution to the school and local community. For example, 100 students in Year 10 engage in weekly community based learning ranging from sports coaching in primary schools and working alongside students from a local special school, to conservation work with the local authority. Increased provision for work related learning, work experience and careers education, together with innovative work in information and communication technology, help to prepare the students well for their future economic well-being. The school recognises the need to develop further their skills in literacy and numeracy.

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

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector