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Mr M Stewart
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Stewart

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 16 January 2008, for the time you gave to our telephone discussion, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am particularly grateful to the members of the senior leadership team, vice-chair of governors, local authority officer, School Improvement Partner and pupils for the discussions I had with them.

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 13 and 14 December 2006, the school was asked to address the following areas for improvement.

- Improve teaching by consistently applying behaviour management strategies, increasing levels of challenge and the amount of active learning in lessons, and planning better to meet students' individual needs.
- Focus the school's self-evaluation on the impact of the actions taken, rather than the provision made, and ensure that the process is consistently and rigorously applied.

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 students' achievement.

There has been a strong focus on raising expectations and presenting more challenge to students. The closer monitoring of students' progress and successful engagement of students and parents in understanding how to improve performance are having a positive effect on raising standards.

In 2007, the Year 11 results showed a marked rise in the proportion of students achieving five A* to C GCSE grades from 36% to 54%. The proportion of passes which includes mathematics and English also rose, from 28% to 38%. These results exceeded the school targets. Improvement at Key Stage 3 has been slower. The proportion of students achieving the higher levels in national tests has been highest in science, where targets were exceeded. Results in English and mathematics were lower than expected. However, the school has evidence to show that non attendance of a small number of students has had a disproportionate impact on lowering the overall results. A relatively high number of students enter the school with low levels of literacy and with learning difficulties. The school has established small classes for several of these students in Year 7 and Year 8, to help with their transition to secondary school and to raise their standards in basic numeracy and literacy. The full impact of this provision and clear selection criteria for students in the class have yet to be established. The school is correctly targeting literacy as a priority area for improvement and has plans to modify the curriculum to support this work.

The school's specialist status for mathematics and computing has helped to raise standards in these subjects. Targets for GCSE passes in mathematics were almost reached and targets in information and communication technology (ICT) were exceeded. Several ICT courses have been designed creatively to meet the needs of a wide range of students.

The school has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching. There is now less inadequate teaching and better systems are in place to manage incidents of student misbehaviour. Lessons provide more variety, pace and the opportunity for students to engage in practical activities. Senior staff are aware that further work is needed in some lessons to sharpen the learning intentions and to involve students more effectively in discussing their own ideas and listening to those of others. To this end the school is piloting an 'Opening Minds' project with Year 7 pupils which seeks to improve students' social and communication skills. Initial evaluation of this work shows it is promoting students' enjoyment of learning and helping to develop their speaking and listening skills.

The school has improved systems to support behaviour management in lessons. This has had a positive effect which is demonstrated by a sharp fall in the number of students sent out of lessons and a halving of the number excluded. Staff have recently reviewed the system to accentuate praise for positive behaviour and to ensure greater consistency across the school. The revised arrangements show potential for sustained improvement.

The headteacher and staff have used the judgements of the December 2006 inspection to strengthen the school's self-evaluation and to measure the impact of initiatives more thoroughly. The roles and responsibilities of senior staff have been reviewed to sharpen monitoring. Work of the local authority advisers and the school's improvement partner is strengthening the school's curriculum planning and its self-evaluation. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development which is underpinned by effective use of a wide variety of data. Governors are more closely involved in evaluating the school's performance and have

taken effective steps to support the school in improving the quality of teaching. The school is monitoring teaching regularly and has introduced a revised proforma for recording lesson observations in more detail. Departmental planning is developing, although in some cases it lacks specific action to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently there remains some inconsistency in teaching, of which the school is aware.

The headteacher and senior leaders have set out a clear direction for improving the school's performance and have established a solid foundation for the school's further development.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector