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17 March 2008

The Headteacher  
North Denes Middle School  
Jellicoe Road  
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Dear Mrs Heywood

### SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NORTH DENES MIDDLE SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 11 – 12 March 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Roger Fry

Additional Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF NORTH DENES MIDDLE SCHOOL Report from the third monitoring inspection: 11-12 March 2008

### Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed lessons in all classes and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior team, core subject leaders, support staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and two governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

There have been no significant changes since the last monitoring visit.

### Achievement and standards

Many pupils enter the school with below average standards. The school's accurate data this year shows that seven in ten pupils are making good progress across the school overall and that they are closing the gap with nationally expected standards. The improvements in teaching show in pupils' better progress and the pace of improvement is quickening.

The present Year 6 is a relatively lower performing year. Approximately one third of pupils did not join the school at the beginning of Year 3 and there are high proportions of pupils with learning difficulties. The predictions in test results for pupils to reach in 2008 are realistic. Pupils are on course to get close to the revised targets this year. Overall, they are making satisfactory progress from their starting points and are on course to reach below average standards.

Teachers and support staff have identified pupils who made little progress last year across the school and diagnosed their learning needs accurately. These pupils are now making satisfactory progress again and some make good progress. The extra group work to boost their knowledge and skills in English and mathematics is successful.

Evidence from lessons seen during the monitoring visit confirms that pupils are making good progress in many classes this term. In Year 7, for example, the teaching encouraged pupils' accelerated progress. More able pupils in an English lesson worked successfully with aspects of Year 8 writing tasks.

In Year 5, pupils made good progress in both mathematics lessons. Pupils learnt how to use a protractor successfully and showed that they could estimate the size of angles to within 5° and many could then measure them accurately. The school is giving good attention to accelerating pupils' progress and moving pupils on when they are ready to do so.

The school gives good attention to science. In Years 4 and 6, pupils were observed discovering at first-hand. In Year 4, pupils learned about 3-pin plugs and electricity in the home in one class, and in the other whether different materials conducted

electricity. Work in these lessons was at the standards expected nationally. Year 6 pupils discovered and recorded the parts of a daffodil and then explained their purposes clearly.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve achievement and raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics, by accelerating the rate of pupils' progress - good

### Personal development and well-being

This aspect of the school's work was reported after the last monitoring visit.

### Quality of provision

The system for tracking pupils' attainment and progress is good. Progress continues to be good with this initiative as more information is added, but all the information about pupils' attainment and progress is not included in the computer-based tracking record. Teachers set accurate short and longer-term targets for all pupils, study the performances of different groups and identify underachievement, and where pupils make good progress and why. The tracking system has already helped teachers decide which pupils need extra support and of what sort, to help them make better progress. There is extensive provision for small groups who have particular needs in English and mathematics to accelerate their progress. About 150 pupils successfully develop their knowledge and skills using a computer-based program. Support staff play an important role in boosting pupils' individual or small group progress.

Pupils have targets in English and mathematics in every class that reflect their current learning needs at three different levels of difficulty. There is a high degree of consistency between classes in the way that targets are set, which is improving pupils' progress. Pupils do not have targets individual to them. Pupils on the school council say that they are ready for them and look forward to having personal targets that will help them to improve their work.

Older pupils are grouped in 'sets' of similar abilities in English, mathematics and science. This arrangement is working well because it helps teachers match the work to pupils' needs more effectively. The level of challenge for the higher attainers has improved and the school is responding better to pupils' needs. The school's own monitoring of pupils' work carried out over the last term shows that the match of work, which is typically good in mathematics and English, is not as well organised in other subjects, such as religious education. This is an area for development. The provision for the gifted and talented pupils continues to improve. They have, for example, additional Latin and philosophy lessons, which they enjoy.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved most significantly in Year 7 in the last 15 months because, for example, lesson planning is much better organised between the classes. Overall, teaching and learning throughout the school have improved since the last monitoring visit and has securely reached the school's target for this term. There is greater pace in the teaching and more is expected of pupils.

There is a very good adult to pupil ratio, which is being used increasingly well to provide targeted help for individuals and groups. A further important improvement is that teachers plan the curriculum more closely together in year groups. Joint planning means that there is a good level of coherence and continuity between classes in the same year. The curriculum includes all, as topics are planned for all pupils to experience together, albeit at different levels of difficulty in the work that they attempt.

The management of pupils' behaviour is good. Lesson targets are clear and teachers explain what they are to pupils at the start of lessons. References to previous and future lessons help to capture pupils' attention and interest. Teachers' summaries at the end of lessons have improved because enough time is allowed for this activity for it to be meaningful. In most cases, they successfully highlight and revise pupils' gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. In some lessons, there is too much light in the room so that the projected images from the interactive whiteboards are not as visible as they could be.

Pupils showed no lack of willingness to do what they had been asked quickly in the 10 lessons observed. Teachers set timescales in which work needed to be completed and rewarded good responses. This is a major improvement in the teaching and contributes to pupils' consistently better progress in lessons.

### Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and use accurate assessment information to set pupils challenging targets and inform teachers' planning – good

### Leadership and management

The good recent progress is partly the result of a more stable staff over the last year and the consistency that this has brought to the school's work, and the clear focus on improving pupils' progress.

Over the last term, the LA has passed over more responsibility for change to the school. This has been the correct course of action, because governors, senior and middle leaders are now demonstrating that they are able to take the school forward according to the evolving action plan. This term, the headteacher and senior staff have written their own 'Raising Achievement Plan' (RAP). The school has made good progress towards having the required capacity to improve without external support.

Visits to other schools have provided a good source of ideas and confirmed where practice is good and where further improvement is needed. Subject leaders are learning from the good practice in other schools and are offering their good ideas to those schools.

A third of parents responded to the inspection questionnaire. The majority are pleased with what the school offers, and commented on the good progress that their

children make. They feel their children are well served by the many extra curricular activities and many other aspects of the school's work. A significant minority has concerns about the school and the behaviour of pupils. The findings of the inspection are that leadership and management are continuing to improve and that there has been good progress since last term. In lessons observed and in pupils' movement around the school, behaviour was good. Pupils have responded well to the increased pace in lessons and their behaviour has improved, because they have to listen more carefully and respond more often in each lesson. Members of the school council also mentioned that the school's policy to counter bullying has been successful over the last year. The school is working more closely with parents and events for them, such as about reading with their children at home, are well attended.

Over the last 15 months, school leaders have put a range of initiatives into place to improve pupils' progress. Monitoring of lessons and pupils' work is carried out regularly by senior staff. As a result, developments in teaching are now more focused on how teachers will improve pupils' learning. Further assistance from LA consultants has helped to guide subject leaders in English and mathematics to identify and develop some aspects that are not as strong as they should be, such as writing standards. The subject leaders of these core subjects have made good progress in organising their subjects, and are now in a stronger position than previously to develop more effective methods to improve pupils' learning further. Each core subject leader has a 'shadow', who is learning the job.

The governors are fully supportive of all initiatives. They have made good progress over the last term in fulfilling their duties as 'critical friends' to the school. They have responded positively to advice and have made a series of observations in classes to check that school policies are in place and to look at the provision for English and mathematics. They are increasingly involved in looking critically at how good pupils' progress is and understand more clearly what it means to monitor teaching and learning. This work is ongoing and governors are consolidating their skills.

### Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, in particular that of middle managers, and develop greater rigour in the checks made on teaching and learning to ensure they are always strongly focused on raising achievement and standards – good

### External support

The project board continues to raise questions for governors and the senior staff to consider and to ask for evidence to back up assertions made by the school. This process is helping the school to improve more quickly. The statement of action and the RAPs continue to have a positive effect on the school's work. The quality of the external support provided for the school by the LA is good. There has been a range of well targeted support for all three areas where the school needs to improve.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Set pupils individual targets to help them improve their work and take more responsibility for their progress.
- Consolidate all pupils' tracking information onto the same computer program to make it more accessible and easier to use.
- Ensure that work across all subjects is as well matched to pupils' abilities as it is in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that the governing body continues to consolidate their work as 'critical friends' of the school.