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Mrs Sharon Ferrell
Elliott School
Pullman Gardens
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Dear Mrs Ferrell

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and the students gave when I inspected your school on 17 June 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

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 27-28 November 2007 the school was asked to:

- Accelerate students' achievement between Years 7 and 11 to raise standards.
- Improve teaching, so more of it is good and none inadequate.
- Improve students' behaviour so they are better prepared for learning.
- Work more effectively with parents and carers to improve students' attendance and punctuality, both to school and to lessons.

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. In relation to improving attendance and punctuality, and particularly in reducing the number of students persistently absent from school, good progress has been made.

The senior leadership team has been strengthened by two associate leaders with headship experience. In addition, a neighbouring school is supporting the development of teaching and learning by working with subject teams and contributing to the school's programme for continuous professional development. The local authority's statement of action is well focused on the priorities for improvement. Quite rightly, emphasis has been given to enhancing leadership capacity and improving teachers' effectiveness in accelerating students' progress. The authority's support has been effective. For example, their recent review of teaching and learning clarifies where progress has been made and where there is more work to do. This complex pattern of additional and external support is well-

managed by the headteacher whose strong leadership is tenaciously focused on improving outcomes for students.

Students' achievement is now central to the evaluation of team and individual teacher performance. Regular monitoring is embedded in practice and line management is making teachers accountable for students' progress. An appropriate balance of support and challenge is helping leaders to manage their teams both more effectively and more autonomously. The underachievement of individual learners is identified quickly and intervention strategies are helping students to get back on track. The school has adjusted upwards its targets for students' achievement in GCSE examinations in 2008. Whilst achievement is improving, the school's data indicates students are making better progress in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. The school is aware of this and the need to ensure that targets for achievement in national tests in Year 9 are sufficiently challenging.

Specialism in languages has a positive impact on the wider school. Students appreciate, and benefit from, the breadth of choice they have in studying languages. Progress towards specialist targets is reviewed regularly. Assessment data indicates that standards in specialist subjects are rising.

Systems for monitoring teaching and learning are increasingly rigorous. Monitoring records show the proportion of good or better teaching has increased. Teachers are more secure in their understanding of national curriculum levels and how they can accelerate students' progress in relationship to them. More teachers are using assessment information well to plan a tighter match between students' need and learning objectives. Good headway has been made on this journey with more distance to be travelled in creating opportunities for students to be involved in peer and self-assessment in lessons. Not all students have the confidence and skills to take ownership of success criteria and apply them as independent learners. The development of these important skills is sometimes hampered when students experience too many cover lessons. The school is working hard to minimise the impact of staff absence and unfilled posts but these issues interrupt the momentum of improvement.

Where students were making good progress in the parts of lessons observed during the inspection, planning was effective with a close match between learning objectives and the needs of students, pace was maintained by appropriate time checks, there was a good variety of activities, relationships were warm and teachers were confident in their management of classes. In the parts of lessons where students made slower progress, there was an over-reliance on whole class teaching, teachers talked for too long, students struggled to sustain concentration and learning activities were not always well matched to their needs.

Students' attitudes and behaviour are improving. Students themselves report that behaviour in lessons and around the school is much better. Given the poor state of the buildings and a learning environment that is frequently either very hot or very cold depending on the weather, this is a significant achievement. The school will be rebuilt under the 'Building Schools for the Future' scheme. Work is scheduled to begin in 2010. In the school's view, especially the students', the building programme

cannot begin quickly enough. Students are acutely aware of the state of the buildings and the impact of their poor condition on learning resources.

The school has been both persistent and successful in working with students and their families where there are concerns about attendance. Attendance statistics show an improvement in comparison with the same period last year. The focus on the importance of punctuality and a high level of staff presence when students are moving between sessions has reduced lateness to lessons and school.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector