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Ms Jan Stogdon
The Headteacher
The Michael Tippett School
Heron Road
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Dear Ms Stogdon

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 20 May 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the staff, other professionals and, of course, to the students.

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 1 May 2007, the school was asked to:

- analyse information about pupils' progress in order to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and teaching and plan interventions which will address weaknesses identified
- improve the systems for rigorously monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's performance in order to inform planning for further improvement
- ensure that the leadership team has the capacity to fulfil their responsibility to ensure the quality of all aspects of the provision while at the same time managing the move to a new site.

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. This has been a busy year for the staff, students and their families because, less than three months ago, the school relocated to new, purpose-built premises. Leaders and managers are very clear that this is a new building and not a new school. This monitoring visit confirms that appropriately high focus has been devoted to the move but not at the expense of whole-school development.

School staff continue to collect information on students' progress through regular assessments. These assessments provide good, accurate information about the students' levels of academic and personal attainment using P-levels. The information

shows students' attainment for each year but in its current form the data is not sufficiently detailed to show how much progress is made. This is because attainment is recorded in whole P-levels and does not identify the smaller steps made towards each level. In addition, the school does not have a clear view about the amount of progress that they expect for students of different ages and abilities and, therefore, whether or not they have made enough progress. These factors hamper the schools ability to evaluate the effectiveness of learning in relation to aspects of teaching, the curriculum and support to students. In order to ensure that this area of the schools' work is sufficiently developed before the next inspection it is important that the tracking and evaluation of students' progress is given higher priority. Senior staff are aware of this and are planning to implement a system to track students' progress from their individual starting points more effectively.

With the exception of systems to track students' progress, existing systems to monitor and evaluate the school's performance have been revised, revamped or reinstated. This adds more rigour to the procedures and represents satisfactory progress towards addressing this particular area for development. This improvement is partly linked to the senior leadership team's focus on making the best use of time to get the business done. As a result, staff have developed the ability to look at something critically, respond to it and move on. Examples of this are the weekly meetings of the senior leadership team where they evaluate performance against key criteria, and the improved committee meetings of the governing body. In both cases this enables key personnel to gain reliable and pertinent information from relevant staff, which then leads to actions that can be followed up at the next meeting. This has made a significant difference to the quality of professional dialogue between staff, governors and those who support the school from external agencies. There is a greater sense of shared responsibility and accountability for school improvement. The school seeks the support and advice from other professionals positively and with confidence. The school improvement partner and external consultants have given good support. The staff value this external critique of their practice and use the advice wisely before considering any changes. The school is mindful that a more extensive review of the curriculum is now needed, particularly in response to national changes for 14 to 19-year olds and to tie in changes made possible by improved facilities in the new building.

Although improved professional dialogue enables staff to talk about the effectiveness of the provision, they do not yet have a clear way of showing how well they are doing, what works well, what does not, and how this links to underachievement and intervention. There is not yet a clear mechanism for evaluations to contribute to school improvement plans. Nevertheless, these improvements, together with the senior management team's review of their practice, have resulted in more staff taking on leadership responsibilities, thus contributing to their improved capacity to develop further.

The school has made good progress in developing the capacity of the senior leadership team. They have embraced the move to the new building as an opportunity to critically analyse staff roles and responsibilities. They have evaluated the effectiveness of their practice in relation to their impact on students' personal and academic development. As a result, they have decided to maintain some existing

systems and have taken the opportunity to do some things differently. Effective performance management procedures have been important factors in making changes. One such change has been developing the role of middle managers to take on key responsibilities. These include leadership for information and communication technology, and for personal, social and health education. This is a very sensible development, ensuring the timely improvement of these important aspects of the curriculum. The empowerment of these middle managers is not only improving practice that makes a direct difference to the students, but is also developing staff confidence and accountability as leaders. There is still much to be done. Although the students have settled well to their new learning environment there are areas that are not yet fully in use. These include the food technology area, the hydrotherapy pool and access to the facilities on the first floor. The staff, as well as the students, need time to grow into the new building and to consolidate new systems, roles and responsibilities. It is important that the capacity of leaders and managers is maintained and developed at an appropriate pace and not compromised by external or internal pressures to do too much too soon. The headteacher has a very clear strategic view and is working diligently with the staff and the local authority to ensure that improvements can be maintained well into the future.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector