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Mr B Clayton
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Clayton

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 October 2008 with Charlie Henry HMI, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to all the staff, students, governors and local authority officers for their contribution during the inspection programme.

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 23 and 24 January 2008, the school was asked to:

- increase the progress made by students in Years 7-11, especially in English, by ensuring that more teaching is of good or better quality
- ensure that, through more regular marking and monitoring of students' work, teachers advise students how to improve their work
- ensure that all faculty heads regularly and frequently monitor the work of their faculties.

Since the last inspection in January 2008, an assistant headteacher has been appointed to take responsibility for coordinating the self evaluation and quality assurance programme.

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 pupils' achievement.

Since the last inspection the school has implemented a number of strategies to improve achievement and standards in Key Stages 3 and 4. A planned programme of intervention with target groups of students in English and mathematics, alongside an

assertive mentoring programme, is now fully in place and have been effective in improving achievement and standards. The school has returned all of the English papers for remarking and validated National Curriculum levels are not yet known. However, the most recent school tracking data indicates that standards in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved and are above average. School data indicates that standards in mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 have remained above average with a greater proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in mathematics. Students are making satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science in Years 7, 8 and 9. At Key Stage 4, unvalidated GCSE data indicates that the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C has risen significantly in mathematics and in English from the previous year. Indicative science results at Key Stage 4 have improved and the school met its modest target. Science has been identified by the school as an area for further improvement and challenging targets have now been set. School data shows that progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 is now satisfactory for mathematics, English and science. Standards at the end of Year 11 in French, German and Spanish are in line with national expectations. However, few students achieve the highest GCSE grades in French.

The school self-evaluation and quality assurance programme ensures that lessons are regularly observed and individual support, through lead practitioners, put in place to increase the proportion of lessons judged to be good or better. As a result, the proportion of good and better teaching has increased since the previous inspection. The school almost met its target of 50% good and outstanding lessons by summer 2008. Parts of lessons observed by HMI during the inspection were satisfactory with some good elements. Students were fully engaged in their learning, aware of their National Curriculum targets and what they needed to do to improve further. However, on occasions, the pace of delivery was rather brisk and did not give enough time for teachers or students to fully assess learning. Students report work is regularly marked with useful comments. This was seen in a sample of books scrutinised during the inspection. Marking provides helpful and positive comments and National Curriculum levels. The best examples pose questions to students about how they could improve further, but there is not a consistent expectation that these questions will be followed up.

The rigour of the school self-evaluation and quality assurance programme has become firmly established across the school. Faculty heads have a secure knowledge of the quality of teaching and learning in their area and a good understanding of the progress students are making. This information is being used for improvement planning within the faculty, although it has not yet had time to demonstrate the full effect on progress. Regular scrutiny meetings ensure that middle leaders are held accountable and senior leaders have a detailed picture of each faculty. The school actively encourages regular feedback from students and together with the student voice coordinator they make a valuable contribution to school self-evaluation and quality assurance.

The Specialist Language College status is beginning to have an impact across the school with the introduction of a new French course and a broader languages curriculum at Key Stage 4. The recently introduced language taster programme in Year 7, which includes Japanese, French, German and Spanish, is popular and the proportion of students choosing languages has increased recently at Key Stage 4. The school has recognised that previous performance in MFL has been inconsistent and in some cases unsatisfactory. However, an extensive intervention programme has been implemented and, as a result, GCSE A* to C results in French, German and Spanish have all improved. However, the achievement of more able pupils, particularly in French, remains too low.

External support by the local authority and other consultants has been effective in supporting the school through a difficult period. This includes additional advisor support, subject consultants and inclusion in the Northamptonshire Raising the Game Project. The monitoring of agreed actions in the local authority statement of action is provided through the link advisor and a task group. The most recent evaluative review provided clear and helpful feedback, highlighting key areas for development. The local authority milestone target for the quality of teaching and learning has almost been met.

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

Yours sincerely

Marian Harker
Her Majesty's Inspector