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Ms Di Mashiter
The Headteacher
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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 16 September 2008, 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 the chair of governors, staff and students who spoke to me during the day.

The senior leadership team has been restructured since the last inspection, following the resignations of the deputy headteacher in May and two assistant headteachers in July. An associate headteacher and a consultant senior leader have provided additional support to the senior team. There has been a big change of middle leaders, over half of whom are new or recent appointments. The governing body has been through a similar period of change, with a number of new governors, including a new chair and vice-chair.

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 22 January 2008, the school was asked to:

- Ensure that the school meets statutory requirements and improve the quality of governance.
- Empower staff at all levels to lead and to develop good practice across the school.
- Raise expectations of what pupils can achieve and set challenging targets for all.
- Engage pupils in their learning and make sure that they know what they need to do to improve their work.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing these issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievements.

The school now meets statutory requirements with regard to providing a daily act of collective worship, reporting progress in citizenship to parents and implementing a race equality policy. Governors' committees have been re-structured and now meet regularly. The headteacher and the local authority (LA) have worked hard to develop the role of the governing body and this has resulted in a number of improvements. Recent appointments and an increased involvement in the life of the school mean that the governing body is in a much better position to help shape the strategic direction of the school and challenge senior leaders on its performance.

Senior leaders, including those who are new, have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and of what needs to be done to ensure improvement, based on accurate monitoring and self-evaluation. They are beginning to challenge middle managers more rigorously. Good structures are in place to support staff and their professional development is focused clearly on the issues identified for improvement. The headteacher has achieved the difficult task of raising morale while making clear to staff exactly where improvements are needed. A new staffing structure has been drawn up, supported by detailed job descriptions. This makes lines of accountability clear and distributes leadership roles sensibly. As one teacher said, 'Things are much better now. Expectations are clear – they were woolly before.' Systems are now in place to enable middle managers to monitor and evaluate provision in their areas of responsibility. One head of department commented, 'We're informing senior leaders now, rather than senior leaders informing us'. Another added, 'Departmental development plans mean something now and things shift because of them'. Although there is still some way to go before all middle managers have the skills to be fully accountable, post holders show enthusiasm and a desire to do their best for their pupils. They are beginning to grow rapidly in confidence and expertise under the headteacher's leadership. Good practice is being shared through initiatives such as the setting up of 'Teaching and Learning Communities', regular and clearly focused lesson observations as well as strategies such as 'Tip of the Week'. Evidence from records of lesson observations, the LA and feedback from pupils shows that, as a result, teaching has improved, although more remains to be done before the overall quality of teaching and learning rises from satisfactory to good.

Although there is still a long way to go before the school can be confident that all pupils are achieving as well as they can, a good start has been made in this area. At the time of the last inspection a parent said that 'average is acceptable'. This is no longer the case. There has been a great deal of work undertaken since January and particularly since Easter to develop a comprehensive system for tracking pupils' progress. The data system is well on the way to being consistently used by teachers to help them plan their lessons and ensure that pupils of all abilities make appropriate progress. Targets are now challenging, rather than comfortable, and teachers are getting better at expecting more of their pupils. As one pupil commented, 'My teacher teaches us to think outside the box.' The school is now in a

good position to demonstrate where progress is being made and to identify those pupils in need of additional support.

Pupils say that they now feel much more involved in their learning and that lessons are more interesting as a result. They also say that the recent focus on behaviour management means that far fewer lessons are disrupted by low-level noise or answering back. They are positive about the targets they are set and report that most teachers make sure that they understand what they need to do to improve their work. The evidence supports their views. Important steps have been taken to improve teaching and learning. Learning objectives and outcomes are shared more consistently with pupils so that they have a better grasp of what is expected of them. Teachers are using a wider range of activities that engage pupils in their learning.

The school makes good use of its specialist status in visual and performing arts to support school improvement. Leadership is good and has enabled the provision of additional resources, such as an art gallery, a recording studio and classroom projectors that have enhanced the learning of pupils within the specialist areas and across the curriculum as a whole. Good teaching and learning strategies in the specialist subjects are used to support the development of learning in other subjects. The curriculum has been enhanced through the introduction of subjects such as GCSE animation and the provision of cross-curricular days. Standards in the specialist subjects are above average, particularly in art where almost all students gained a higher grade GCSE in 2008.

The LA is providing effective challenge and support for the school across the areas for improvement in the inspection report. Its statement of action is clear and recognises the existing strengths of the school while outlining appropriate strategies for areas that require improvement. The LA has confidence in the ability of the headteacher, leadership team and governors to take the school forward.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn Bappa".

Dr Lynn Bappa
Additional Inspector