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10 December 2008

Ms Marion Lewis
Headteacher
Mellow Lane School
Hewens Road
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Dear Ms Lewis

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 2 December 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also thank the chair of governors and students for their contributions.

Staffing is stable. However, the school experiences difficulty in appointing suitably qualified teachers to the few posts that do become available. The school has not been able to appoint a head of English. An assistant headteacher with expertise in English is overseeing the department for one term. There are three supply teachers in the science department.

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 30 April and 1 May 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement
- raise the quality of teaching
- strive to improve attendance
- improve the environment outdoors and in the classroom.

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. It is also on probation as a specialist humanities school.

Improving standards in Year 11 was given a high priority in 2008. Monitoring of students' progress was strengthened. This enabled underperformance to be detected more effectively and the appropriate support and challenge to be provided. There was also considerable support to improve the quality of teaching. The school was

particularly successful in enabling students to attain at least a grade C at GCSE level. As a result, the percentage of students attaining five or more A*–C grades increased by a very impressive 20 percentage points. When English and mathematics are included, there is a 4 percentage point rise compared to 2007. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well. More effective use of performance data means that it has identified other groups of students who continue to underachieve. It is taking robust action where there has been underperformance in particular subjects, including history. There is a slow, rising trend at Key Stage 3, where the school is now adopting the tracking and monitoring procedures used successfully last year with Year 11.

Satisfactory improvements in the quality of teaching have underpinned the rising standards, although some inconsistencies remain. For instance, the school's monitoring shows that the proportion of good teaching in mathematics has doubled since last year, although it is still below the school's own expectations. Teachers now use a wider range of teaching and learning strategies. This is confirmed by students one of whom commented, 'We are now more involved in lessons. You are made to think about what you are doing. It is not just bookwork.' During this visit, behaviour in classrooms and around the school was good. There is still inconsistent use of challenging targets to raise students' expectations of what they can achieve.

The school has made good progress in adopting robust procedures to raise attendance levels but impact is more limited. The governors have approved the issuing of fixed-term penalties; requests for absence for holidays during term time are being refused; and there is rapid contact with parents when absences occur. This is complemented by a higher profile for good attendance, with commensurate rewards. Attendance has risen but, because the school started from such a low base, it is still well below average. Nevertheless, punctuality has improved and the proportion of persistent absentees has been reduced.

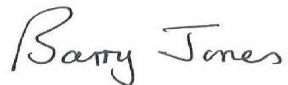
The school has made good progress in improving the school environment, including an impressive amount of repair and redecoration. Students' art work on show is of a high quality and is used to raise other students' expectations. Display in some other subjects, however, is mainly commercially produced. It is not complemented sufficiently by work done by students to demonstrate the range of experiences in those subjects. Students say that the more stimulating environment encourages them to take better care of their surroundings.

There is a mixed picture with regard to the specialist subjects. The trend in standards is downwards. This is due mainly to a decline in performance in history, where there have been staffing difficulties. Although these have been resolved, standards are not yet high enough. English provides good support for whole-school improvement and for promoting community links.

The local authority's work is well focused and there has also been effective support by City Challenge. The main focus last year was on English and mathematics. Appropriately, more attention is now being given to bringing about improvements in science. The school also benefits from positive leadership by the headteacher.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry Jones". The script is cursive and fluid.

Barry Jones
Additional Inspector