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Mrs J Tridgell
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Tridgell

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 20 January 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please thank all those who I met to discuss the school's development and, especially, 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 11 and 12 June 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise levels of students' achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4
- improve the overall quality of teaching and learning by reducing the number of less effective lessons.

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

The school has made considerable efforts to improve standards and achievement. Overall standards and progress are satisfactory at Key Stage 3, but it is clear from unvalidated data that in 2008 standards in both English and science at Level 5+ and 6+ were higher than local and national averages. At Key Stage 4 standards in 2008 were well below national averages, but the school's own rigorous analysis of performance data demonstrates clearly that students in Year 11 are now making much better progress than their counterparts at this stage last year. Although standards and achievement at Key Stage 4 remain a concern, the gap between attainment and key targets is narrowing.

Much of this improvement has been due to the excellent leadership qualities of the new headteacher. She has quickly, and effectively, engaged all staff in focusing on



addressing school weaknesses and making good progress in tackling the issues raised by the previous inspection. She is determined to ensure that the more rigorous assessment, monitoring and target setting procedures lead to all round excellent practice. In this, she is well supported by a rejuvenated senior team and middle leaders who in turn are driving improvements in teaching and learning in their various areas. She has ensured that more effective tracking systems have been implemented which are having a positive impact on achievement. These systems are rigorous but easy to use, which has enabled all staff to identify which groups are still underachieving and where progress has been made. The vast majority of students know what they are expected to achieve and are able to discuss their own progress.

My visits to a sample of classrooms confirmed that the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Where teaching engages students and challenges them to be more responsible for their work students respond well and the pace of the lesson is brisk. Through their marking, staff are now more effective in sharing the next steps in students' learning, a feature which the students themselves indicated was a marked improvement since the last inspection. However, inconsistencies remain in applying behaviour for learning techniques in all lessons and the school has already planned good quality support to improve this. Work is increasingly better tailored to students' needs, including the more able.

The contribution of the specialism to school improvement is satisfactory and improving. It had a slow start in 2007 given that it was necessarily focused on making the transition to new accommodation. The evaluation letter from the Specialist School Team in November 2008 identified a number of areas which the specialism needed to address urgently, such as clarifying how it was contributing to school improvement and raising achievement. The school is now addressing these issues. In this, and other aspects of school improvement, the school is obtaining good support from its School Improvement Partner and National Challenge Adviser.

Support provided by the local authority is good. Its action plan for improving the school has been aligned very well with the school's own Raising Achievement Plan, and provides a good planning routeway to success. The local authority has increased the amount of time which the consultants spend in school providing a tight focus on the key areas requiring most improvement. This is helping the school to make rapid improvements in the quality of its provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector