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Mrs C Abbott
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Abbott

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 19 May 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Would you please pass on my thanks to the senior and middle leaders, the local authority, the chair of governors, the human resources manager and those students who gave of their time to talk with me during the visit?

As a result of the inspection on 8 and 9 October 2008, the school was asked to:

- ensure that the school complies fully with current government requirements for safeguarding
- monitor and evaluate the impact of the actions to raise achievement
- ensure targets for all students are sufficiently challenging
- develop the range of vocational provision in the sixth form.

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.

In 2008 the overall performance at GCSE was in line with national averages, but the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics was below average. Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups, made satisfactory progress overall. But, there was some underachievement in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in science in Key Stage 3. Since the last inspection, a variety of strategies have been implemented and refined to improve upon students' achievement. The school's data shows that pupils' achievement is improving. In December 2008 29% of pupils were on track to achieve 5 A* to C grades including English and



mathematics. This rose to 37% in March 2009 and 42% in May. If realised in the 2009 examinations, this would represent an increase in 7% from the results in 2008.

The school is using its specialist college status positively to improve provision in local partner schools. Work undertaken with primary schools includes weekly 'master classes', funding for visits to stimulate pupils' interests in science and mathematics, and support for primary school class teachers. Specialist status has also helped the school improve its own provision through focusing on curriculum developments and improvements in teaching and learning. A wide range of science courses provides opportunities for students of all capabilities to gain qualifications and, as part of the Key Stage 3 'Stem' project, to develop their personal and leadership skills. Use of the finances to sponsor community work provides students with opportunities to engage with local businesses and to develop their social skills and sensitivity through working with the residents of a local nursing home.

Since the last inspection, the school has taken decisive action to ensure that the safeguarding procedures are secure. Training and support have been provided for senior staff, governors and the school's human resources manager. At the end of March 2009, the local authority's audit of safeguarding at the school concluded that the operating procedures were compliant with DCSF guidance. The evidence presented by the school during the monitoring inspection confirmed that the systems are now secure. The National College for School Leadership safeguarding training has been undertaken by the headteacher, several key school staff and a member of the governing body.

Over recent months the school has implemented strategies to develop the skills of leaders and teachers on the use of data to track students' progress and monitor the impact of actions on students' achievements. The tracking systems have become more sophisticated and are providing staff with increasingly accurate details of students' progress. Intervention strategies are now more carefully matched to students' needs and teachers are setting students' targets which are more closely matched to individual needs. Consequently, senior staff can now monitor and evaluate more effectively the actions taken to raise achievement.

Greater emphasis has been placed on providing work in lessons which meets the needs of students of all capabilities. In the English lessons observed during the inspection, pupils knew their targets and teachers guided students towards them in lessons and through marking. However, in mathematics, although targets were written in students' books, they were not sufficiently referred to in lessons and did not provide sufficient challenge for some of the students. Most students stated that their mathematics targets did not help them improve their work.

Since the last inspection, the opinions of parents and students have been sought concerning the provision of additional vocational courses in the sixth form. As a result of this, a Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) Applied Science course and an iMedia course are to begin in September 2009. A range of other

accredited shorter vocational e-learning courses are planned for students in the sixth form.

The school has received very effective, well targeted support from the local authority. There was immediate action taken by the local authority in response to the shortcomings found in the safeguarding procedures and strong support given to the school's human resources manager. The local authority continues to support the school and monitor progress against all key areas through the statement of action.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector