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Mr David Mitchell
Headteacher
Morpeth Chantry Middle School
Mitford Road
Morpeth
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Dear Mr Mitchell,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 5 November 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

Since the last inspection on 30 September to 1 October 2008, the number of pupils attending the school has fallen slightly. The school achieved specialist technology college status in September 2009. In addition, a formal partnership arrangement began at that time with a neighbouring middle school and a nearby high school. This arrangement includes a single governing body responsible for the three schools.

As a result of the last inspection, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and improve progress in mathematics at Key Stage 2
- extend school evaluation to include middle managers in regular monitoring of the school's work and ensure that they are accountable for raising standards and improving provision
- increase the proportion of good and better teaching and learning
- respond to parents' concerns about the information they receive on their children's progress.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment remains average overall in English, mathematics and science with some better than average performance at the higher National Curriculum levels in English at Key Stage 2 as shown in the test results for 2009. Observations during the inspection and data provided by the school confirm that pupils are beginning to make better gains in their learning since the last inspection given their starting points. In 2009, the proportion of pupils making two levels of progress in mathematics at Key Stage 2 showed an increase on the previous two years, although results in national tests were disappointing, missing the ambitious targets set by the school. Of the two years of study at Key Stage 3, in Years 7 and 8, pupils' progress is better in mathematics than English.

After a period of turbulence in staffing the management structure has stabilised. Middle managers possess a renewed sense of determination, purpose and increasing accountability for school improvement. With well-targeted help from the local authority, consultants and the federated governing body, middle managers now understand more clearly the schools strengths and weaknesses and are working to well-considered plans to help bring about sustained improvement. These plans include a systematic approach to lesson observations, scrutiny of pupil's work and use of pupil performance data. Teachers speak enthusiastically about their contribution to whole-school improvement and the progress made in this area which was seen during the inspection. Because of the shared use of reliable data the school is confident of meeting its challenging targets for 2010. However, they rightly acknowledge there is more to do by increasing the accountability of all classroom teachers in monitoring their own performance in terms of outcomes for pupils.

Pupils speak well of their teachers and enjoy their learning. In the eight part-lessons observed participation levels were high and many practical activities were undertaken. For example, in a lively Year 8 technology lesson pupils were designing and manufacturing a variety of different hats. Pupils were helping each other learn by assisting in the making of their hats and evaluating each others' products with sincerity and skill. In the less engaging lessons the pace of learning was slow and often there was too much direction given by the teacher resulting in fewer opportunities for pupils to learn by doing. The school acknowledges these areas of weakness. It is using the local authority to confirm its evaluations on the quality of teaching and assist in the introduction of improvement strategies that are beginning to have an effect on improving pupils' learning. Pupil's generally know their targets and the levels of progress made, although they are less clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

Pupil progress reports to parents are informative and give targets for improvements in all subjects. Levels are given and an indication of how these compare nationally. The meaning of National Curriculum sub-levels is clearly explained in a covering

letter to parents and analysis made of parental comments regarding their child's progress. The school plans to send out reports to parents more frequently from the beginning of this academic year.

The specialism is at an early stage of its introduction. Plans are in place to build on existing relationships with local businesses and industries to provide improved learning opportunities for pupils.

The federated governing body is helping secure the improvements evident since the last inspection. While newly formed, its members have been associated with the school for some time and continue to hold the school to account.

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

Peter Cox
Additional inspector