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Headteacher
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Dear Dr Selby

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 March 2010, for the time you gave to our initial meeting and for the information you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the students, staff and governors for their courtesy and help during the inspection.

Since the previous inspection the school has faced a substantial financial deficit related to a falling roll that is linked to the changing demography of the area. It is predicted that this fall will continue over the coming years. The deficit has been reduced significantly through careful financial management. The school has, as a result, lost one full-time teacher and two part-time teachers. The loss of a permanent member of the senior leadership team has led to a reorganisation of the leadership team and the cooption of a senior middle manager to lead on learning. Other members of the middle management team continue to form part of the extended senior management team. A further review of the middle management structure is currently being undertaken.

As a result of the inspection on 10 and 11 April 2008, the school was asked to ensure that systems to monitor and evaluate students' performance were applied consistently across the school to raise standards and that the rigour of leadership and management at all levels should be improved to ensure greater accountability and consistency of practice.

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

The standards achieved by students have improved since the previous inspection. The average point score for students when their best eight subjects are taken into account is significantly above the national average and has risen for the last three years. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics has also improved and is above that found nationally. The progress of students as indicated by the contextual value added measure has improved and is well above that found nationally. Progress in English is stronger than in mathematics. In lessons students are generally well behaved and apply themselves to their learning. In the best lessons students show real interest in the subject and are keen to do well. They show the ability to work independently and in groups. Where teaching is satisfactory students continue to apply themselves, but show less interest and enjoyment in their work. In these lessons students are more passive learners with the result that progress slows.

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. The school now has robust systems to monitor the quality of teaching. Judgements have been moderated through observations by consultants and advisers from the local authority and senior staff from other local schools. Joint observations by inspectors and members of the senior leadership team confirmed that the school is able to assess accurately the quality of teaching. The school's records show that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching has improved slightly and the small proportion of inadequate teaching has been eradicated.

The school now has robust systems in place to monitor the progress of students. Students are set challenging targets and progress against these is monitored each term. This data is scrutinised by the deputy headteacher, pastoral staff and heads of department to identify students at risk of underachievement so that appropriate interventions can be applied. Students are well aware of their targets and those spoken to were confident that they were given good advice by their teachers, who knew clearly how well they were performing. The process of assessment and target setting is now appropriately being refined through the introduction of the national Assessing Pupils' Progress initiative.

There is now a clear system of accountability for managers at all levels in the school. Heads of department are involved in monitoring progress in their departments through a calendar of planned evaluations that include lesson observations and work scrutiny. There are formal meetings with a senior member of staff at points during the year to review progress, but in one department formal meetings had not regularly occurred. Heads of department complete an evaluation of their department and report that they are now held rigorously to account for provision and the progress of students in the departments. Following the previous inspection and a

subject monitoring inspection by HMI, intensive support has been provided to three departments in which weaknesses in leadership and management had been identified. A programme of rigorous challenge combined with training and support, including visits to other schools, has been implemented. There are signs that this programme of support has led to improved leadership in these areas, but there remains more to be done.

The school is a specialist college for sport. The specialism is making a good contribution to the ethos of the school and to enriching the curriculum through a range of clubs and activities, including a strong focus on outdoor education. In addition, there is effective outreach work in local primary schools. Despite these positive features, there is limited take-up of examination courses in physical education at Key Stage 4 and attainment targets have not been met. However, targets in the second subject, science, have been met and these good results have continued to improve. The school is aware that performance in physical education needs to improve and intensive support and challenge is being provided to the department.

The school has successfully demonstrated that it has increased its capacity to improve. There has been a clear and successful focus on developing the capacity of middle leaders through training and by providing opportunities for staff to take on whole-school responsibilities. The impact of this work is evident in the upward trends in attainment and achievement, and in improvements to the quality of teaching. The self-evaluation of the strengths and areas for development in the school is accurate and involves the governing body, which provides effective support and challenge. Planning for improvement is secure and has identified the correct priorities for action, although there is scope to define success criteria more clearly in relation to outcomes for students. The progress made by the school reflects effective support by the local authority and the benefits of working in partnership with other schools through the South Lakes Federation.

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

Garry Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector