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Mrs C Howell
Headteacher
Derwent Lower School
Hitchin Road
Henlow
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Dear Mrs Howell

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 Friday 7 May 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Particular thanks to the three governors who found time to come into school to speak with me.

Since the last inspection there have been significant changes in the governing body. A new chair and vice-chair of governors were appointed at the start of the spring term and two new governors have taken up post, including an associate governor. An experienced clerk has also been appointed to the governing body. One teacher has returned after long-term absence.

As a result of the inspection on 30 November 2009, the school was asked to

- strengthen procedures for safeguarding pupils to ensure that it meets all statutory requirements
- improve management, leadership and governance of the school
- introduce a clear new marking policy across all subjects.

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.

Pupils make good progress in lessons and achieve standards in most subjects that are above the levels expected for their age. Lively and engaging teaching underpins the consistent progress that pupils make as they move up through the school. Their very good behaviour and positive attitudes make a strong contribution to their good learning. The pupils know their working levels and understand broadly what they



need to do to improve, but there remain inconsistencies in the quality and use of assessment. The school has reviewed marking and has drafted a new policy. Importantly, it has recognised the need to link marking with other aspects of assessment, including 'assessment for learning' in lessons and the use of assessment information in lesson planning. Teachers accept the principles of the draft policy, and the best practice evident in Year 4 is starting to be more widely adopted in other classes. Pupils are increasingly given opportunities to evaluate their own work and that of their peers.

The school has responded with suitable urgency to strengthen procedures for safeguarding and to meet all statutory requirements, including the implementation and organisation of risk assessments and bullying and racist incident logs. Procedures are in place to ensure that safeguarding policies are regularly reviewed and that their effectiveness is monitored.

Since the last inspection, the most significant improvement has been the development of the governing body. Governors have worked hard to fulfil their role, including their legal responsibilities, and improve their effectiveness. The governing body is well organised so that governors are able to develop a sound knowledge of the school, understand their responsibilities and are able to hold the school to account. Governors have a clear oversight of safeguarding procedures and have been proactive in implementing their monitoring role. Their hard work and commitment have been well supported by training and guidance from the local authority. Apart from the good progress in developing the role of the governing body, other aspects of leadership and management have also been strengthened. Leadership roles have been clarified, with individual responsibilities better delegated, and management procedures and paperwork more systematically organised. However, important aspects of self-evaluation and strategic planning are not sufficiently robust. The school development plan addresses each of the key areas for improvement, but some success criteria are unhelpful or unambitious because they define implementation rather than identifying any impact on outcomes for pupils. The headteacher has made a start on whole-school self-evaluation, but it is not sufficiently sharply focused or concise. There is a lack of clarity about the difference between monitoring and evaluation, and the role that governors need to have in this regard.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose and has suitably prioritised support for the school. Its impact has been satisfactory. The school has welcomed the additional support provided by the School Improvement Partner and the consultant headteacher and values the guidance provided for governors.

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

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector