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Mr John McParland
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr McParland

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 January 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

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 17 and 18 January 2007, the school was asked to:

- provide targeted support for all students with learning difficulties and monitor these students' progress more rigorously against their individual small step targets.
- ensure the school's self-evaluation is made more realistically against clear, understood criteria; and that the impact of improvement activity is evaluated dispassionately and robustly
- evaluate more thoroughly the progress and needs of particular groups, including girls, lower attainers, and those for whom English is an additional language; and improve specific provision for these groups
- raise standards in science and history.

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 pupils' achievement.

The school supports and monitors students with learning difficulties well. The additional educational needs coordinator works effectively with year and subject leaders to identify students' specific needs and monitor actions taken to support them. An individual action plan is in place for every student identified with learning difficulties with clear points for improvement. Monitoring of students' progress is

rigorous. Effective, regular communication between subject heads, year heads and the additional needs coordinator is a key strength that has resulted in the good progress the school has made. The support provided by teachers and learning assistants within the school's learning support centre contributes well to student achievement. A new initiative, the supported literacy programme, is boosting the reading, writing and spelling ages of Year 8 students who were assessed to have a reading age of below nine years old. The school still needs to focus its attention on refining individual targets set for students, as some targets are not clearly defined or specifically time bound.

The school has made good progress in improving its self-evaluation. The school improvement plan and post-Ofsted action plan are realistic. Actions within the school improvement plan reflect the key priorities that the school needs to address. The new management structure clearly identifies responsibilities linked to school priorities and progress against clear criteria is regularly reviewed by both the senior leadership team and the school's governing body. The frequency with which the governing body meets has increased. Committees within the governing body have good knowledge of the school's performance and have improved their monitoring of the school's actions. The improved scrutiny by governors has led to a good level of challenge which has added rigour to the self-evaluation process. Ensuring that the science department achieves its attainment targets continues to be a key priority.

The school has analysed well the performance of all groups of students, incorporating a system whereby underperformance is picked up more quickly. Monitoring of students is undertaken more regularly. The school is now using more ambitious attainment targets, although these are not completely embedded throughout all of the school's work. Assessment data are used effectively, particularly at senior and middle leadership levels, to inform the school of the progress students are making throughout the year. As a result, clear actions have been taken to improve underperformance, particularly of girls. In 2007 the progress made by middle ability girls improved on the previous year and many students with learning difficulties achieved well at Key Stage 4. The provision for students for whom English is an additional language has improved since the last inspection. Individual student support and targeted staff training are addressing the needs of students well.

Standards are rising at Key Stage 4 and have been maintained at Key Stage 3. The proportion of students who attains five or more GCSEs grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is significantly above the national average. The proportion of students attaining A* to C grades has improved during the period of 2005–07. Students' standards in history have improved well on 2006 performance, results are now above the national average. Average point scores for history are in line with the national average. In 2007, standards attained in science at Key Stage 3 were above the national average. Although standards at Key Stage 4 are below the national average, there has been improvement in the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A* to C. The head of science has identified accurately areas for improvement and many measures have been put in place to raise standards further. The school has worked well with its local authority School Improvement Partner to improve classroom practice and develop the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. The science department's revision of lesson plans and schemes of work has led to consistent

practice within lessons. There is still more work to be done to improve students' understanding of the National Curriculum levels and what students need to do to improve. Students have reported that support to improve their examination grades has improved in the last year. There is evidence to suggest, from the school's own monitoring of performance, that standards are set to rise in history and science, with a further increase in the proportion of students attaining grades A* to C expected in 2008.

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

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector