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Ms M Derry
Stalham High School
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Dear Ms Derry

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 8 July 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. As the inspection coincided with the school's Literacy Festival, I was not able to see many 'normal' lessons. However, I much enjoyed the opportunity to observe cross-curricular activities such as the eco-fashion show. Please pass on my thanks to the students, staff and governors who spoke to me.

Since the last inspection, a new chair of governors has been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 14 January 2010, the school was asked to:

- raise attainment to be at least in line with the national average by:
 - improving teaching and learning and the use of attainment data to cater effectively for all students
 - ensuring that students are clear about what they should do to improve
- ensure that the school's curriculum effectively caters for all students by the introduction of suitable vocational provision, collaborating with nearby vocational providers where appropriate
- ensure that the governing body provide sufficient challenge to the school by:
 - setting clear targets and monitoring progress towards them
 - improving evaluations of the effectiveness of policies and action plans
 - training governors so that they are familiar with performance indicators and can challenge data given to them
- enable students to develop better skills of independent learning by:
 - ensuring that literacy and numeracy skills are developed in all subjects
 - improving students' confidence and motivation by using role models and by celebrating achievement in class and around the school.



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.

The previous report noted that students' attainment was well below average. One reason was that students were making slower than average progress. The other was that a minority of students were not taking the expected number of GCSE or other accredited qualifications. The school has tackled both these issues: the first through improvements to teaching, assessment and academic monitoring; the second by changes to the curriculum.

With the support of the local authority, senior staff have undertaken many lesson observations and scrutinised students' work to identify each teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers have also had the opportunity to observe each other. This process has identified examples of good practice that can be shared with colleagues as well as highlighting specific areas for improvement for each teacher. Professional development has included support from local authority advisers and effective teachers from other schools. Teachers are now planning lessons with more thought to what students should be learning and with more emphasis on improving their literacy. Marking and assessment have improved, so more students know the current level of their work and what they need to do to reach the next level. The school and the local authority are judging the majority of lessons to have good teaching and learning. Furthermore, the school now tracks the progress of each student and provides extra support, including one-to-one tuition, for those who are falling behind. As a result, students are now making better progress. The school's own assessment records indicate that standards are improving in nearly all subjects. Achievement has therefore improved. In most respects, attainment is now in line with the national average.

The school has also made several improvements to the curriculum so that it will better meet the needs of future students. The current Year 9 students have been offered a much wider range of opportunities in Key Stage 4. These include creative and media, information technology and performing arts diplomas provided in nearby schools as well as vocational courses in art, sport, performing arts and construction provided at Stalham. Students also have a wider range of options in science and modern foreign languages. These changes do not affect students already embarked on Key Stage 4 courses. However, they are benefiting from some smaller changes: their lessons in religious education and citizenship now lead to qualifications and some students are gaining key skills qualifications.

The most significant impact of the headteacher's leadership has been evident in the more positive ethos and higher expectation. Staff have accepted the need for change and are working hard to make improvements. Students say that lessons are more enjoyable and that they feel more motivated to succeed. On the day of the inspection, students were well behaved around the school and fully engaged in the Literacy Festival. Several students were able to demonstrate how they were



developing teamwork, leadership and independent learning skills. Students from the Student Learning Council explained how they contribute to improving teaching and learning, for example, by attending departmental meetings to give their views.

The governing body has tightened its procedures so that it now operates more efficiently. It has now approved a single equalities scheme that meets statutory requirements. Several governors have attended training to understand school data better.

The school recognises that it still has much to do. While teaching has improved, it is not yet consistently good. The quality of assessment in lessons is inconsistent and there is more work to be done to ensure that lessons meet the full range of students' needs. Work to improve students' numeracy across the curriculum is under-developed. Progress and attainment are improving, but the full impact of changes to the curriculum will not be apparent until 2012, when the current Year 9 students take their examinations. The school's humanities specialist status is not yet a driving force for improvement. The governing body is now better placed to influence and challenge the school, but has had only a limited time to demonstrate its effectiveness in these respects.

The local authority has an effective action plan and provides good support for the school. The school and the governing body have benefited from advisory support and access to training. The local authority has also brokered additional support from other schools through the Gaining Ground initiative and by arranging for an experienced deputy headteacher to be seconded to the school.

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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

