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Mr M MacCourt
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr MacCourt

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 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my particular thanks to the students and staff who met with me and for the time they gave me.

As a result of the inspection on 11 December 2008, the school was asked to;

- raise standards and accelerate students' achievement in mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT), English and literacy
- introduce more quickly a greater range of external accreditation, including that which enables students to attain qualifications at higher levels
- work closely with the local authority and other agencies to ensure that the integration of new students is carefully planned and does not cause disruption to the school.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress on the issues identified at the last inspection.

A raft of measures implemented since the last inspection have successfully accelerated students' achievement in mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT), English and particularly literacy. Overall, students across the school make good progress in all of these subjects. However, there are variations remaining within particular year groups and subjects. Throughout Key Stage 3 pupils make the most rapid gains in science and ICT, with progress in mathematics not far behind. The least progress is made in English, where standards are also the lowest. Overall, standards remain below the national average in these subjects, but the gap is narrowing. The majority of students in Year 7 make good progress and are on target to be very close to the national average by Year 9. However, poor attendance by a small group of the current Year 9 students has an



adverse impact on their learning and these students underachieve. The quality of teaching throughout Key Stage 3 is good in mathematics and science, but satisfactory in English. At times, the pace of teaching slows in Key Stage 3 English lessons and this impedes students' learning. Marking of students' work in English is not consistently followed through to ensure students make the improvements required to raise their achievement. Throughout Year 10 students make consistently good progress, but their standards remain below average, reflecting their attainment on entry. At the time of the last inspection many Year 11 students were disaffected with learning. Since then the implementation of relevant courses and targeted support, including support for a few at 7 o'clock in the morning to catch up on coursework, has significantly accelerated their learning. The distance to catch up has been so great that overall their standards remain below average. However, the school's data suggest that a few Year 11 students are on target to reach GCSE grades close to the national average.

Since the last inspection the school has rapidly increased the range of courses available to students to enable them to attain qualifications at higher levels. Five new GCSE courses have been introduced along with opportunities to reach a Level 2 qualification in adult literacy and numeracy. In addition, two Year 11 students have followed a NVQ Level 1 motor maintenance and repair course. These courses have improved students' attendance and raised their confidence and self-esteem as well as their achievement. Of the current Year 11 students, two have taken 6 GCSEs, one 5 GCSEs and all have taken at least 1 GCSE. Almost all Year 11 students have secured a place at college or meaningful employment when they leave school. There are secure plans in place to significantly increase further the range of accredited vocational courses at different local colleges, for example in construction and land based studies.

There is now very good engagement between the local authority and the school over the placement of very challenging students in a school already working incredibly hard to meet the needs of very vulnerable students. The local authority supports the school in a range of flexible and imaginative ways in integrating new students so that they do not cause disruption. For example, students may be placed on roll but most of their needs may be met through a range of imaginative tailor-made programmes away from the main school site. Other agencies are supportive in assisting with these educational programmes. In addition, the headteacher now sits on an admissions forum involved in making decisions about the placement of new students in 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

Jeffery Plumb
Additional Inspector