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Mr Kevin Harrison
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Harrison

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Macclesfield High School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 22 September 2010 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

In response to falling rolls across Macclesfield, the local authority has recently initiated informal consultation with the local community about possible closure of the school from August 2011. Uncertainty about the school's future has contributed to a 9% drop in the school's population since the last inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 04 February 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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 students' achievement.

Students' attainment has risen. For example, at Key Stage 4 the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics rose markedly from 31% in 2009 to an unvalidated figure of 42% in 2010. Higher attainment and improved progress were evident in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, although results in science remained significantly below average. Improved results were also evident in the sixth form. The school's tracking data seen during the inspection suggest that these higher results can be sustained and built on in future years. Similarly, tracking data illustrate that less-able students now make progress in line with other groups.

Although still an area of concern, attendance has risen. The school has introduced a range of measures aimed at improving attendance, including appointing for the first time a full-time attendance manager to work alongside the family liaison officer. These appointments are supporting the school's drive to engage the support of parents and carers in encouraging regular attendance. Attendance now has a much higher profile in the school and this is understood both by staff and students. The impact of the school's strategies, including the reward system, is evident in the whole-year attendance figures for 2009/10, which show a clear improvement on the previous year and met the school's target agreed with the local authority. Similarly, concerted efforts from the school have reduced the proportion of students who are persistent absentees, although the school's leaders accept that the proportion remains well above average. The school's records show that fewer students are late to school.

Attitudes to learning remain variable, but there are signs of overall improvements. Students are happier in their lessons because they feel clearer about teachers' expectations. Most students display positive attitudes to work, offer ideas readily and respond well to the tasks that they are set; however, a few work well only when under close supervision and lack self-motivation. Where learning is more effective, teachers display enthusiasm for their subject, develop positive relationships with students and stimulate students' interests through well-focused activities. Where tasks are mundane, the pace of learning drops.

Behaviour has improved both in lessons and around the school. A small minority of students continue to exhibit challenging behaviour, but teachers' skills in class management have developed so that confrontations are avoided and the impact of misbehaviour is minimised. Improved behaviour has had a positive impact on students' learning: fewer lessons are disrupted by unacceptable behaviour and parents and carers, teachers and students agree that the school is now a calmer place. The school's improved strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour contributed to a dramatic 44% drop in the number of exclusions in the period March to June 2010, compared with the same period in the previous year.

The monitoring visit found no evidence of weakness in the school's safeguarding processes.

The school's improvements have been underpinned by increased accountability among senior and middle leaders, the improved use of data to monitor students' progress, and more targeted support for students, including mentoring and one-to-one coaching. The school has a broadly accurate view of teaching and has records that show a small increase in the proportion of good or better lessons. The local authority statement of action fulfils requirements and provides a useful structure for the school's improvement planning. Support from the local authority and the National Challenge Adviser has been strong. The school's leaders have particularly valued the opportunity to make appointments with a focus on the areas where the

school needs to improve, such as additional staffing in core subjects and supporting attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2010

- Raise attainment by ensuring that:
 - students make at least their expected progress in all subjects
 - students who start Year 7 below the expected level make good progress in improving their basic skills and levels of achievement at GCSE.

- Improve the attitudes to learning of a small minority of students by ensuring that:
 - expectations of acceptable behaviour are consistently high
 - teaching motivates and challenges students to achieve specific outcomes that help them meet their targets.

- Improve attendance and punctuality by:
 - reducing persistent absence
 - increasing the effectiveness of rewards for regular attendance
 - encouraging more support from parents and carers.