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Mr G Sadler  
Headteacher  
St Felix CofE VC Middle School  
Fordham Road  
Newmarket  
CB8 7BE

Dear Mr Sadler

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of St Felix CofE VC Middle School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 November 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to staff and students.

Since the last inspection, the school has undergone significant changes. In addition to recovering from the continuing effects of a fire and consequent complete rebuild in 2008, the school is subject to the local authority reorganisation of schools. The school will be closed in the summer of 2012 as the transition is made from a three-tier to a two-tier school system. Staff turnover has been significant over the last year. The school roll is falling.

As a result of the inspection on 10 June 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 has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the last inspection, students' attainment has improved. Students join the school with prior attainment that varies but is generally below average. At Key Stage 2, they make good progress and start Key Stage 3 with standards that are around the national average. This improvement accelerates in Years 7 and 8 so that they leave with attainment that is generally above that expected for their age in mathematics and writing, though in line for reading. Boys achieve less well than girls, but the gap is narrowing and is currently smaller than the gap seen nationally. Those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress that is comparable to their peers. Behaviour, judged good at the last inspection, has

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improved further. The number of short internal exclusions has declined markedly. Punctuality is good and attendance is improving.

Improvements in achievement have been brought about by the school's successful efforts to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Much professional development has been undertaken. As a result, the use of assessment is now embedded across the school and is providing a much clearer indication of the progress that pupils are making as well as being a good tool for target setting and monitoring. Assessments are accurate and, in many classes, they are used well to structure the teaching and learning so that all pupils are challenged.

In the most successful classes, teachers pitch the level high and encourage students through clear questioning and interesting activities. In these classes, learning and progress are good because students are interested and are stimulated to enquire and discuss with their peers. Some teachers skilfully manipulate this to encourage the development of very good learning skills. Marking has improved. Pupils now report that homework is consistently given and marked with helpful comments. Students know their attainment levels and most are clear about what they need to do to improve. Much effort has been devoted to the further development of literacy and numeracy, for example through dedicated timetable slots for reading. However, opportunities to further develop these skills in subjects other than in English and mathematics are being missed. The provision of one-to-one literacy and numeracy support is very effective.

Much leadership and management training has been undertaken. Subject and whole-school self-evaluations are largely accurate, realistic and sufficiently self-critical. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Challenging targets are set at whole-school, subject and individual levels and are increasingly met. Leaders and managers observe lessons systematically and so have an accurate view of teaching practice. Observations are now beginning to focus more on the students and their learning. In class, many teachers accurately tailor the teaching to ensure that students of all abilities learn well. However, this is not the case in all lessons and, in a minority, learning is limited as a result.

The school has been through a turbulent recent period. The fire and loss of much students' and teachers' work, the subsequent rebuilding and staff turnover, have all added to this. However, the headteacher, senior managers, and governing body have supported staff and students well. They have successfully ensured that the school has maintained the momentum of improvement and that the adverse effect on students has been minimal.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Raise standards further by ensuring that pupils make consistently good progress in lessons by making certain that:
  - teachers are clear what they want pupils to learn or experience in a lesson and then plan the sequence of activities to reach those objectives taking into account the wide range of pupils' needs
  - marking gives a clear indication how pupils can improve their work
  - there are good opportunities to extend writing and reading skills in all subjects.
  
- Provide subject leaders with additional leadership and management training so that:
  - when they evaluate their subject area, the key starting points are pupils' standards and progress
  - action planning uses pupils' standards and progress as a key means of judging the success and impact of their initiatives.