

# The Gryphon School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113890
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	338261
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 November 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Anne Looney HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1633
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	415
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nigel Rees
<b>Headteacher</b>	Steve Hillier
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22–23 May 2007
<b>School address</b>	Bristol Road Sherborne DT9 4EQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01935 813122
<b>Fax number</b>	01935 816992
<b>Email address</b>	office@gryphon.dorset.sch.uk

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<b>Registered childcare provision</b>	Little Gryphons
<b>Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision</b>	73
<b>Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision</b>	17 November 2005

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	3–4 November 2010
<b>Inspection number</b>	338261

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 40 lessons, observed 40 teachers and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents and students' work. They also scrutinised 410 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, and those completed by staff and a sample of students from each year group.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How effectively do teaching and the curriculum meet the needs of all groups of students, including minority groups?
- How well have the improvements made in mathematics been sustained?
- How effectively are middle leaders involved in the drive for improvement?
- How well does provision in the sixth form ensure that students, including those new to the school, achieve the best possible outcomes?

## Information about the school

The Gryphon School is an oversubscribed school that is larger than the average comprehensive. Numbers have increased significantly over the last three years. It serves the country town of Sherborne but also attracts students from outside the area, particularly into the sixth form. The Gryphon has had specialist school status in business and enterprise since 2004. The school works in partnership with five other secondary schools and one further education college to provide 14 to 19 vocational education. The majority of students are White British, and there are few students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who speak English as an additional language. There is a specialist unit for students with dyslexia. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is higher than average. Their needs include specific learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The Little Gryphons day nursery, which operates from premises on the school site, is run by the school's governing body.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

The Gryphon is an outstanding school which, under the determined leadership of the headteacher, has succeeded in raising standards considerably while maintaining a very strong sense of being an inclusive community. Students are confident and articulate and the overwhelming majority of those who responded to the questionnaire said that they enjoyed school. They reflect well on their work, and both value, and respond positively to, the support they receive from the school to help them achieve. As one student said, 'The school applauds us when we do well' and they have done well. Examination results have improved year on year, attainment is now high and all groups of students make at least good progress from their various starting points. The outstanding care, guidance and support students receive are a major factor in promoting the inclusive nature of the school. Students flourish in this caring environment and respond by showing consistently thoughtful and highly considerate behaviour. The majority of the outcomes that relate to their broader personal development are outstanding.

The school provides students with an outstanding curriculum which is enhanced well by its specialist status. It is broad and balanced throughout, and exceptional flexibility at Key Stage 4 allows personalisation, not just for groups but also for individuals. The taught curriculum is enhanced very well by extremely popular and diverse extra-curricular provision which plays a significant role in promoting students' personal development. Teaching and learning are good overall, and in about one fifth of the lessons observed teaching was outstanding. The school has focused staff development well on how students learn, and the majority of lessons include good opportunities for students to be active and work collaboratively. A key characteristic of the best teaching is the effective use of ongoing assessment in lessons and the subsequent appropriate use of reinforcement or extension to ensure students make the best progress they can. Assessment and feedback are not, however, used consistently well. As a result not all students are clear about exactly how to improve their work, and so not all are making the outstanding progress to which the school aspires.

The school's excellent systems for monitoring students' progress are based on extremely thorough and comprehensive data analysis. Senior leaders have worked hard to ensure that all staff understand how the target data translate into goals for individual students. Significant and well-planned intervention following a drop in results in mathematics has been highly successful and the subject is now performing well. This exemplifies the school's outstanding capacity to improve. Very good

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systems for the formal monitoring of teaching and learning are balanced by well-funded training opportunities. The formal observations have not, however, been followed up sufficiently regularly to ensure a high level of consistency in key areas of classroom practice. The school has considered very well how it might promote community cohesion at local level and has a high profile with many groups in the locality. Plans are less effective in terms of how the school might address community cohesion at national and global levels. The senior leaders and governing body have a very clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Improvement planning is focused sharply on the school's priorities and shows very clearly how targets are to be achieved.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning and achieve greater consistency across the school, by ensuring that:
  - more regular monitoring and support help teachers move their practice to the next level
  - all students have a detailed understanding of the next steps they need to take to improve their work.
- Improve the effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion, by building on the successful work done at a local level with a more rigorous approach to the national and global context.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****1**

Students of all ages and abilities engage well with their learning. They concentrate well and are confident to contribute, and even take risks, in front of the whole class. They show self-discipline and maturity when moving from active, independent or group work to whole-class discussion and work productively in pairs and in groups. Students' learning is particularly effective, and their progress outstanding, when the needs of all groups in the class are very well planned for and met, and when students are fully involved in the assessment of their own learning and that of their peers. Students can talk well about what helps them learn and what they need to do to be able to make really good progress. In the large majority of lessons seen during the inspection, all groups of students made at least good progress.

Attainment has improved significantly over the last three years and is now securely high. The school has targeted its resources well and this has led, for example, to a big improvement in examination success for boys. An analysis of the unvalidated 2010 data shows that attainment in subjects with sizeable entries, including mathematics, rose considerably, particularly for those students working at the highest levels. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average and all groups of students make at least good progress by the end of Year 11. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make equally good progress. The school's accurate and reliable data show that the current Year 11 is set to meet, or even exceed, the challenging targets set by the school.

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Students say that they feel safe at all times, and parents and carers strongly support this view. Students are very committed to, and keen to promote, their school community. Two examples, among many, were the success of the senior choir in the national finals of the BBC Songs of Praise Choir of the Year competition and students' involvement in the full-length feature film *Far from the Madding Crowd* that was shown on national television. Students have a very strong sense of right and wrong. Although they show a good understanding of facets of other cultures, their comprehension of what it is like to live further afield in multicultural Britain is less sophisticated. They have a very wide range of skills to prepare them for their future lives.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

The school has been innovative in the way it has developed curriculum provision to extend learning experiences and meet the increasingly broad range of needs at Key Stage 4. Partnerships with local schools, further education colleges and the Little Gryphons nursery have allowed the school to develop an impressive choice of vocational courses and provide opportunities for students who might otherwise not have engaged fully with their education. At Key Stage 3 there are opportunities for early examination entry and project days when younger students can develop their cross-curricular and business skills in depth. Students' take-up of the vast range of visits, clubs and other activities is very high. The school's dyslexia base works very well with students who have specific learning difficulties to ensure that they develop

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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independent learning skills and make good progress.

The school liaises particularly well with external agencies to ensure that support for the most vulnerable students is of the highest quality. Support is exceptionally well tailored to students’ needs and has a positive impact on their achievement, attendance and personal development. The student and family guidance centre and the support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities both contribute strongly to this outstanding provision.

Positive relationships in the classroom are used well by teachers to support the use of varied and interesting activities. Teachers’ very good subject knowledge helps challenge and enthuse students. Teaching assistants make an excellent contribution in the classroom to ensure that students are learning effectively and increasingly independently. Lesson objectives are specific, shared well with students and focused on learning. Questioning is generally used well to challenge students, although occasionally teachers do not allow students enough thinking time. A wide range of data is available to teachers, but it is not always used well in lessons to ensure that the least able students are consistently supported and the most able fully challenged. There are some inconsistencies in the marking of students’ work and in the detail of the feedback.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

### **How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher, ably supported by his senior leadership team, has succeeded very well in sharing his vision of continuing improvement throughout the school. Middle leaders say that their contributions and views are valued. The link subject role of each senior leader ensures that middle leaders are well supported but also held regularly to account. Targets set are challenging but recognised as achievable by staff. The work of the school, in particular in terms of the impact on students’ outcomes, is monitored assiduously and the improvement planning cycle is a well-planned, coherent process which makes good use of a broad range of evidence, including stakeholders’ views. The school’s self-evaluation document is detailed and well supported by evidence. The subject self-evaluations are less consistently analytical. The monitoring of teaching is very well planned; teachers are observed formally, and given feedback, guidance and training on how to improve. There is, however, inconsistency in the level of more informal monitoring between these formal observations to ensure teachers are addressing their areas for improvement.

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The governing body makes a significant contribution to the work of the school. Governors are closely involved at subject level and use their very good understanding of the school’s strengths and areas for development to pose a professional challenge to the senior leaders. The governing body is rightly proud of the quality of partnerships with, for example, other schools, the church and the local business community, and of the school’s key role in the establishment of the Sherborne pyramid partnership. However, the wider national and international dimensions of community cohesion remain relatively underdeveloped.

There are excellent procedures in place to ensure the safety of the students in the school’s care. The school places equality of opportunity at the core of its work and there is, as a result, no unevenness in provision or outcomes for any group.

Since the last inspection the school has engaged particularly well with parents and carers. Their views are elicited regularly, and parents’ and carers’ groups have been instrumental in effecting change at the school. The highly positive response to the parents’ and carers’ questionnaire indicates how significant the improvement has been in this area. One parent summed up well the views of many when commenting, ‘My three children are happy at the Gryphon and the learning environment is peaceful and very successful. The curriculum is very well organised and my children make good progress!’

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

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Outcomes are outstanding for all children. They are eager when listening to stories, or listening and responding to instructions to work independently. Children are making a lot of progress in the skills that will help them learn and integrate socially in the future. Relationships among the children and with staff are very positive. Children behave extremely well and this further supports the development of their excellent social skills. They play very well together and make choices about what they want to do. Children have a very strong awareness of how to eat healthily and about hygiene. Children feel very safe and this is corroborated by the extensive parents’ and carers’ comments.

Children have access to a wide range of indoor and outdoor play experiences and activities. They respond confidently to the planned and stimulating environment and the themes which are set out for them daily. Boys and girls enjoy equally the full range of resources in both the baby unit and the toddlers’ base areas. Staff unobtrusively ensure that no child is left out and offer themselves as very good role models by playing alongside a child. Each child is treated and guided as an individual. Assessment is rigorous and staff have an excellent understanding of how young children learn and progress.

The very experienced manager and her deputy are dynamic leaders who are supported by a very effective team of staff. A strong focus on meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage is confirmed in practice by evidence of excellent progress in each child’s early years learning profile. The setting’s self-evaluation process is rigorous and the impact of new initiatives is closely monitored. The setting is very inclusive and the needs of every child, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are met well. Safeguarding procedures are very robust.

The quality of the childcare provision is outstanding. Children of all ages make excellent progress in their learning and development because they are provided with high levels of care and activities which build on their learning and development and social skills. Very strong partnerships with parents and carers enable the setting to be fully inclusive and to provide very well for the individual child. Children feel very safe and secure and have access to a wide range of indoor and outdoor play experiences and activities. Staff are led by an excellent manager and her deputy, and work together as a well-knit complementary team which continually strives to improve the provision through careful reflection on its practice. The provision meets the requirements for registration.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

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## Sixth form

Overall, students make good progress. There is some variability between subjects and progress ranges from outstanding to satisfactory. It is better at A level and in applied courses than at AS level. There are no significant differences in the progress made by different minority groups and students who arrive at the school in Year 12 make similar progress to that of 'home-grown' students. Retention and attendance rates are good and progression rates on to university are high. In the course of the sixth form, students develop well in the way they take responsibility for their own learning and work profitably with their peers. Sixth formers develop strong leadership and teamwork skills through the considerable contribution they make to the school community as prefects and peer mentors. They also involve themselves well in charitable work.

Teaching is good overall. It is strongest in the applied subjects, where business links are used well to help students relate their studies to the world of work. The curriculum is good. It includes a wide range of Level 3 courses and the school is, appropriately, expanding the number of applied courses to ensure an even better match to students' needs. Opportunities for enrichment are, as in the main school, outstanding. Many of these activities widen students' horizons, encouraging them to consider different pathways for their future lives. Students receive outstanding care, guidance and support; they benefit from personalised support from their tutors and external careers advisers. They are set challenging targets and a high level of support is given to any student who is not meeting the school's high expectations. This intervention has had a significant impact in improving attendance and achievement.

Sixth form leaders know their students well. They use data well to set targets, monitor progress and plan well for intervention. They are proactive in the way they support inclusion, for example in obtaining funding to ensure students are not disadvantaged in their participation in enrichment programmes. Leaders have evaluated carefully where improvements can be made. Changes to the curriculum are well considered but have yet to have an impact on outcomes. The leadership team takes good account of the students' views of the provision, as well as those of their parents and carers.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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## **Views of parents and carers**

The response to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers was well above the national average for secondary schools. Almost all those who responded said that they were happy with their child's experience at the school and believed that the school kept their child safe. A very small minority of parents and carers expressed some concern about how well the school promotes healthy lifestyles, and about how well the school takes account of their suggestions. The inspection team followed up their concerns and found some evidence, which was corroborated by the students' views, that the promotion of a healthy lifestyle was not always having the desired impact. The team found no evidence during the inspection to support parents' and carers' concerns about how well the school took account of their suggestions, and judged this aspect to be good.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Gryphon School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 410 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,633 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	203	50	192	47	11	3	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	188	46	214	52	5	1	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	174	42	212	52	21	5	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	166	40	219	53	15	4	2	0
The teaching is good at this school	171	42	222	54	6	1	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	132	32	236	58	31	8	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	93	23	263	64	36	9	4	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	155	38	218	53	14	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	162	40	211	51	20	5	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	137	33	236	58	13	3	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	99	24	252	61	26	6	5	1
The school is led and managed effectively	175	43	211	51	9	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	223	54	174	42	8	2	2	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



5 November 2010

Dear Children and Students

**Inspection of The Gryphon School and the Little Gryphons Day Nursery,  
Sherborne DT9 4EQ**

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. We enjoyed finding out about your school and the Nursery, both of which we judged to be outstanding.

We were particularly impressed by the way standards have improved so much in recent years but the school has remained a community where everyone's personal development is valued. We thought that your positive attitudes to learning and your outstanding behaviour contributed a great deal to the good, and sometimes outstanding, progress we saw in lessons. Your attitudes, together with the good teaching and outstanding care, guidance and support you receive, ensure that you make good progress by the time you leave the school. The excellent curriculum provides you with a broad and balanced range of opportunities throughout, but we thought that the flexible curriculum at Key Stage 4 met your varied needs very well indeed. The school keeps a very close eye on how well you are doing and intervenes quickly if you fall behind. The senior leaders have a very clear picture of what needs to be improved and plan carefully how to make those improvements. They involve your parents and carers well in the life of the school and almost all the parents and carers who wrote to the inspection team said that they were happy with your experience at the Gryphon.

The school is keen to be even better and we have asked it to do three things. We have asked it to check more regularly on teaching and learning to ensure that it is of consistently high quality, and to ensure that teachers always tell you exactly what you need to do to improve your work. We have also asked senior leaders to make clearer plans for how they are going to promote cohesion with other communities at a national and global level.

You can help by continuing to display your positive attitudes towards your school.

Yours sincerely

Anne Looney  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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