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Mr P Cook
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cook

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Larkrise School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Judith Goodchild and I inspected your school on 10 March 2011, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on our thanks to staff, the chair of governors and to the pupils for their time and courtesy.

There have been several significant contextual changes since the previous inspection. These include: the completion of the new buildings; restructuring of classes; instigation and extension of several new leadership and management roles; and the reorganising of the governing body.

As a result of the inspection on 20 and 21 October 2009, 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:

satisfactory progress in making improvements

and

satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



Overall, pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory. Lesson observations carried out during the inspection showed that the achievement of pupils' with profound and multiple learning difficulties has significantly improved. This is due to the embedding of the changes to the provision and the high calibre of the leadership and management within the Therapeutic Learning Group. Other school and external monitoring information confirms that the good provision and outcomes in the sixth form have been maintained. Here, the possible disruption to learning, due to the accommodation changes and staff absence, was turned into a highly effective learning experience for the students.

In the best parts of the lessons seen, opportunities were planned to enable those pupils working at around the same level to learn together. This allowed 'more-able' pupils to develop independence through increasing their speaking and listening skills by talking with each other, and especially to investigate and solve problems for themselves. Good examples of independence were seen with pupils making cakes for fund raising. In the weakest parts of lessons, the converse happened with the focus on the activity to be completed and on what the teacher was going to do, rather than on what pupils needed to learn.

Interventions to meet pupils' specific needs, such as music therapy, are well planned and pupils' targets link directly with their statements of special educational needs. However, you need to have a quicker way to check and record how, and when, pupils meet these targets. The comments made by staff from first-hand observations related to these targets need to be more succinct, clear and robust to help you judge the value for money provided by the specific interventions.

Teachers are not always sufficiently accountable for the way that they use the available resources and time allocated to 'subject-based' learning. During the majority of lesson observations, it was clear that teaching assistants need to have a greater role in raising pupils' achievement and improving the quality of pupils' learning in lessons. Several teachers seen spent too much time talking to, or singing with, the whole class. This meant that pupils had to wait far too long for their turn.

The use of augmented communications systems has improved so that the school now uses a consistent scheme. Parents and carers are supported, through training, meetings and social activities, to be able to use these systems at home. In the lessons seen, the application of these systems was not consistently employed.

All of the senior leaders have clear roles and responsibilities and are working well together to drive improvement. Since the previous inspection of the school, you have introduced more effective, regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation processes, involving more staff to help drive the school's improvement. Using the school's new tracking information, you and other leaders have identified where more urgent work needs to be done, for example through establishing a robust baseline of pupils' starting points, in all facets of their learning and ensuring that targets are challenging but realistically attainable. Good progress has been made in this area.



There is a clear sense of purpose and direction in the school and it is on track to meet the targets in the school's improvement plan, with the exception of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Self-evaluation is thorough and the local authority has worked effectively with the school to ensure its general accuracy and that it effectively links to the school development plan and points for improvement from the last Ofsted inspection. The school and local authority need as a matter of urgent priority to ensure that the provision and outcomes for the youngest children are swiftly and securely improved.

The governing body and staff carry out their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their care and welfare very well. The restructuring of the governing body is already providing greater challenge and support for the school leadership team through having a clearer vision for the future. The new buildings providing increased accommodation for the sixth form, offices, sensory room and deluxe food technology area are already creating an exciting learning environment for pupils.

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

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2009.

Improve pupils' progress from satisfactory to good by:

- ensuring pupils are clear what they are going to learn in each lesson and that individual targets are precise and challenging
- using assessment more precisely to measure the small steps of progress made by pupils and adapt the planning for the next stage
- using different methods of communication more consistently across the school to aid pupils' understanding and communication skills.

Improve children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:

- developing the role of the key worker
- improving leaders' and managers' understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- assessing more accurately the progress for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.