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Mr Peter Gannon
Headteacher
Silverdale School
Langdale Gardens
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NE28 0HG

Dear Mr Gannon

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you, your staff, your Chair of Governors and School Improvement Partner gave when I inspected your school on 09 February 2010. Thank you also for the time your assistant headteacher gave to our phone discussion and for the information you provided on the preparation day and during my visit. Please pass on my particular thanks to the students, who made me so welcome and who spoke to me so readily about their experiences at the school.

There have been a number of significant changes to the school since the last inspection in March 2008. A new headteacher joined the school in September 2008 and there is also a new Chair of Governors and assistant headteacher. The teaching team in Key Stage 2 is also new. The school buildings have been redecorated and refurbished and facilities have been improved, particularly for physical education and information and communication technology. The number of students on roll has increased. The increase includes some additional places to allow for the assessment of students' special educational needs and/or disabilities.

As a result of the inspection on 25 March 2008, the school was asked to:

- eliminate the problem of absconding students
- address the issue of primary-age pupils' misbehaviour
- develop more robust systems of leadership and management to ensure that continuing improvement does not over-rely on the headteacher
- raise the standard of teaching and learning by providing more support and training for those staff identified as needing it.

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.

September 2009



Students' achievement has risen considerably since the last inspection. A wider range of accreditation at higher levels has greatly increased students' opportunities on leaving school. As a result, all students are expected to go on to further education, training or employment and some have gained modern apprenticeships. Although attainment remains low when compared with national averages, increasing numbers of students are gaining a greater number of GCSE passes, including some at the higher grades of A* to C. In 2009 all students left with qualifications at least at entry level and most gained passes at GCSE or its equivalent. A particularly successful subject was photography, where most students, including a number in Year 10, gained B or C grades.

Progress in lessons is also showing consistent improvement. Students are increasingly confident in talking about what they are learning and in using their reading and mathematical skills to solve a variety of problems. Although writing is improving, the rate of progress is slower than in other areas. However, more students are reaching levels which are closer to national expectations in English, mathematics and science by the end of Key Stages 2 and 3. All of this is underpinned by much better behaviour and students' greater motivation to succeed. Enhanced progress can also be seen in students' participation in a wider range of activities, such as visits for Chinese meals and 'behind the scenes' in the cinema, and in sports, outdoor pursuits and taster courses in further education. Students also make a stronger contribution to the life of the school. They share their views and achievements confidently in the 'circle' and treat the school, its students and staff with much greater pride and respect.

The school has made exceptional progress in removing the problem of absconding students. This problem is now extremely rare, because of enhanced enjoyment and a much better match of teaching and the curriculum to students' needs and interests. The school has also made outstanding progress in improving behaviour, both at Key Stage 2 and throughout the school. Students are far more motivated by the reward system which they helped to develop. There is a marked reduction in the extent to which challenging behaviour disrupts learning in lessons. Activities at the start of the day, such as breakfast, 'morning matters' and 'circle' set a more positive tone. Around the school, at break times and lunchtime, students are much calmer and more friendly and polite to one another and to staff and visitors. Careful records and analysis of any incidents are used increasingly well to identify concerns and to plan support. All staff provide much stronger role models and senior staff have a greater presence around the school in order to intervene rapidly in any potential difficulties.

The quality of teaching is better and more consistent. Staff use their subject expertise more effectively and have higher expectations of students' learning and behaviour. Teachers and teaching assistants are increasingly effective in supporting students to keep them on track in lessons and in de-escalating incidents. Where any upset occurs, little time is lost and students quickly return to their learning. Marking of students' work gives clearer guidance on how to improve, but opportunities for

students to evaluate their own learning have yet to develop fully. Where teaching is more effective, students have greater opportunities to apply their skills in debating personal issues, such as worries, or in reading critically, for example to explore bias in magazine articles. The better teaching also has a stronger emphasis on involving students in practical tasks or in activities which capture their imagination.

The headteacher has led many highly successful changes in the short period of time he has been at the school. This rapid improvement is based on more rigorous self-evaluation of the school and greater involvement of the entire team of staff. Almost all staff now hold key responsibilities. For example, link workers have a stronger role in coordinating pastoral support, while all teachers lead one or more subjects. The senior team has focused successfully on developing the skills of all the staff. Governors are better informed through governors' meetings and visits to the school. These features and the improvements made so far are building the school's capacity for further sustained improvement. This monitoring inspection included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure and meeting current requirements. The school is also a much safer place due to improved behaviour and the significant reduction in the occasions when students abscond.

The School Improvement Partner has provided well-judged support and challenge. Crucially, the local authority has wisely allowed the school's headteacher, staff and governors to determine for themselves the key changes required to make improvements. This has proved highly effective to date.

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

Liz Godman
Additional Inspector