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Mr John Irwin Executive Headteacher
Ms Vanessa Jukes Acting Headteacher
Wakefield District Community School
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Dear Mr Irwin and Ms Jukes

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 April 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks also to the representative of the local authority, the chair of the Interim of the Executive Board (IEB) and, in particular, to the pupils who talked to me about their work.

Following the last inspection the headteacher left the school. An acting headteacher was appointed immediately to take responsibility for the Felkirk School. An executive headteacher was also appointed part-time from November to take overall responsibility for the school and he assumed the role on a full-time basis from 1 April 2010. A team of supply staff has been appointed to cover long-term staff absence and provide stability during a period of change.

The local authority took the decision to apply to the Department for Children, Schools and Families for an IEB to replace the governing body in January 2010. The IEB held its first meeting in March 2010. It is chaired by a National Leader of Education who was, until recently, the headteacher of the National Support School that is working in partnership with the school. The local authority is currently reviewing all provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities which, together with Felkirk School, currently forms part of Wakefield District Community School.

During this visit, eighteen pupils were out of school participating in enrichment activities. The effectiveness of boarding provision provided by Felkirk School was not



evaluated during this monitoring visit as it was judged satisfactory at the last inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 15-16 September 2009, the school was asked to:

- eliminate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion of teaching judged to be good so that the rate of progress pupils make increases, by:
 - engaging the pupils more with the curriculum through practical and exciting learning activities and reducing the amount of worksheets presented to them
 - consistently managing behaviour problems swiftly and effectively so that they do not escalate or disrupt the education of pupils.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils' attainment and achievement were reported in detail at the time of the last inspection. Recent analyses of data confirm that attainment remains low and that pupils do not all achieve as well as they should relative to their starting points when they join the school. However, the school's evaluation of assessment information confirms that progress made by some groups of pupils is beginning to accelerate. For example, over half of pupils in Year 10 are currently on track to meet or exceed challenging targets. Furthermore, all Year 10 pupils have attained a GCSE pass in recently submitted English coursework; this is a significant improvement on previous years. Nevertheless, the school's leaders acknowledge that pupils in Year 11 are unlikely to achieve as well as they might because of the legacy of past underachievement. Pupils' progress in English and mathematics in all years also remains a cause for concern. This is, in part, a result of the current lack of suitably qualified staff to teach these subjects.

Pupils' progress in the lessons observed has improved as have pupils' attitudes to learning. This is because teachers are planning more engaging activities and taking advantage of a wider range of resources than was previously available. These improved attitudes are also reflected in pupils' attendance, which has risen by five percentage points since September 2009.

Strong working relationships between pupils and adults underpin the school's aim to establish a culture of achievement. Pupils' views are more actively sought and the school council has been involved in decisions made about the purchase of new equipment to improve the learning environment. The school's strategy for behaviour management has been simplified and re-launched. Pupils and staff report that the behaviour code is easy to follow and applied consistently in the main. Pupils value the rewards they receive for their efforts and they reflected that the 'pay-back'



system is a fair sanction when behaviour is inappropriate. Pupils' good efforts and academic progress are recorded on celebration cards that are sent weekly to all pupils and their parents or carers. Communication links with parents and carers are being strengthened; arrangements have been made to report to parents formally about their child's progress and an evening has been arranged for parents to come to school and discuss their child's progress with teachers.

The school's new leaders have adopted a 'back to basics' approach in making improvements to the quality of teaching to engage pupils in their learning and accelerate progress. They quickly assessed the most immediate needs for the school and have prioritised actions appropriately with the support of the local authority. Inadequate teaching has been tackled rigorously through a programme of lesson observations and intensive professional development. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving, although its impact on learning and progress is variable. Where behaviour management is applied consistently, disruptions to learning have reduced, but pupils have not all yet developed the basic skills needed to enable them to make the progress they might.

Where teaching is most effective, specialist subject knowledge is shared with enthusiasm by teachers and engages pupils' interest. Planning follows a common format and identifies clearly the objectives for the lesson and intended learning outcomes. The range of activities has been extended to engage pupils more practically in their learning. Reliance on worksheets has been reduced significantly. A suitable focus is placed on developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. Pupils also practise and develop their information and communication technology skills more frequently as a result of the purchase of new laptop computers. However, opportunities are missed to extend the challenge for more-able pupils and enable them to take greater responsibility for their learning. While pupils' efforts and positive attitudes are recognised and celebrated, time is not always allocated for pupils to reflect on what they have learnt during the lesson. Pupils' targets are shared and teaching sometimes takes into account the small steps required for pupils to achieve their personal goals. However, assessment information is not routinely built into teachers' planning to meet individual needs and feedback to pupils does not always provide the guidance that will help to accelerate their progress further.

There has been a clear focus on developing a more innovative approach to teaching and to the curriculum. Leaders have invested heavily in the acquisition of modern technologies to support learning and the purchase of new equipment for both staff and pupils to use. For example, a trampoline has been purchased and new video equipment enables pupils to record their performance and identify for themselves how they might improve. Pupils value the investments made on their behalf. Those interviewed noted how much they liked the fact that they now had a personal tray in which to store their work. They spoke with pride and interest about



the practical activities they had been working on recently in science and technology and enjoy the increased opportunities to participate in residential visits, for example, to North Wales.

A major review of the curriculum has resulted in a programme that is designed to increase the relevance of the curriculum for pupils from September 2010. Pupils currently in Year 9 have recently made option choices that will be new for Year 10. Links have been extended with different providers to increase the range of accredited courses for these pupils.

The executive headteacher and acting headteacher have worked together well during a period of rapid change. A new calendar for school self-review has been established. Improvement plans have been amended in the light of monitoring and have informed ongoing professional development for staff. However, leaders recognise that further refinement is required in their quality assurance procedures to enable them to identify more precisely the impact of changes in provision on pupils' outcomes.

A team spirit has become established during a time of uncertainty which is supporting the drive for improvement. Permanent and temporary staff share a joint commitment to improve the life chances for pupils at the school. Initial school self-evaluation by leaders revealed additional shortcomings in the quality of provision and woeful inadequacies in the quality of resources available for pupils. Set against a significant budget deficit, leaders have been faced with challenges that extend beyond the priorities identified at the time of the last inspection. Additional capacity provided by the executive headteacher and support from the local authority has enabled the school to make the progress that might be expected since the last inspection. The role of the IEB to provide the necessary challenge to secure rapid improvement is in the early stage of development. However, the chair of the IEB is clear about her responsibilities and members of the board bring with them a suitable range of expertise and experience.

The local authority statement of action has been revised following evaluation by HMI and is fit for purpose. The school has valued the intensive support provided by the local authority in tackling short-, medium- and long-term priorities for improvement. Teachers interviewed were very positive about the support received from local authority consultants and the growing partnerships with neighbouring mainstream schools. They shared the view that the isolation of working in a small school had been replaced by valuable opportunities to develop and share good practice. Links with the National Support School have also been highly constructive in providing additional support for the teaching of English, particularly in Year 10. The appointment of the executive headteacher has added significantly to the school's capacity to improve. The decision to apply for an IEB for the school also demonstrates the local authority's commitment to driving improvement more rapidly. Good support has been provided by local authority officers to help the school manage a significant budget deficit.



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

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector