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Ms Debbie Richards
Headteacher
Arbour Vale School
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Dear Mrs Richards

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Arbour Vale School

Thank you for the help which you, your senior and middle leaders along with your business and office managers gave when I inspected your school on 25 January 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on roll has risen from 235 to 247. In addition, the complexity of pupils' additional needs has increased, particularly in relation to behavioural and medical needs as well as multi-sensory impairment.

As a result of the inspection on 11-12 November 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.

The complexity of the pupils' additional needs is such that a judgement on attainment would be inappropriate. Learning, progress and achievement are satisfactory. In parts of Key Stages 2 to 4 and in the sixth form, both the school and inspection evidence identify classes where learning, although satisfactory, is not rapid enough due to weaknesses in teaching. In these lessons there is insufficient use of visual cues to reinforce and develop learning and teachers do not always check pupils' understanding of what is being taught. The work of the specialist



teaching assistants is not always tightly focused on learning, particularly with regard to questioning to consolidate and move learning on.

Teachers have had training on levelling pupils' efforts to allow them to use assessment information better when planning lessons and individual activities. They speak of being far more confident now at assessing where pupils are in their learning and inspection evidence supports this. Targets for improvement are identified for all pupils. Nevertheless, these targets are not yet fully helping learning because they do not have a strong enough focus in all lessons. Staff know pupils' needs well and more-able pupils are identified in classes. In less successful lessons they are not always sufficiently challenged.

Where teaching is good, relationships are very strong and pupils show extremely positive attitudes to learning. Resources are used in inspiring ways to challenge and develop learning and the specialist teaching assistants know exactly what the pupils they focusing on are expected to learn. As a result, they contribute effectively to the good learning that takes place. For example, Key Stage 3 pupils were observed learning effectively in the soft play area during part of a literacy lesson. They thoroughly enjoyed exploring and finding out about the sound 'g' as they completed activities, which really enthused them. When activities are well organised and lessons run at a good pace, enjoyment is clearly evident as was seen in a numeracy lesson in Key Stage 2 where pupils explored the notion of first, second and third.

The role of the middle leaders is being developed soundly through a team leadership development programme. This has yet to have a full impact on the consistency of learning and teaching across the school. The senior leaders are monitoring teaching and learning in all areas and this highlights inconsistencies within most key stages. Currently, there is not enough emphasis on the quality of learning and the priorities for improvement. This has been accurately identified in the school's self-evaluation.

The staff and the governing body listen well to parents through questionnaires and conversations during parents' evening. There is a good two-way connection with parents through texts, e-mails and newsletters. Currently the school is working on developing an interactive web-site. Parents are invited to twilight sessions to improve their understanding of their child's academic progress and personal development. Staffing is now more stable. The school has started to analyse the attendance of staff and this has resulted in a reduction of staff absenteeism.

The school's specialist status has had its second re-designation and practice has been highlighted locally and nationally. Lead professionals from the school have shared good practice in assessment and leadership at national conferences. Pupils' aspirations have been raised by a focus on appropriate accreditation for all to celebrate their successes. Young leaders' initiatives across the school, such as in dance, mathematics and English, as well as sports leaders, are strengthening pupils' personal development and consolidating their confidence and independence. Partnerships with other local schools, the Youth Sport Trust and the Specialist



Schools Academies Trust are impressive. The school has recently won the National Award for Inspiring a legacy for excellence for all.

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

Nina Bee

Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils' academic progress by:
 - improving the consistency in teaching to match the best practice in the school
 - developing the ability of teachers to use assessment information to plan lessons that more effectively meet the learning needs of pupils
 - setting challenging targets so that more-able pupils can achieve higher levels.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills of the middle leaders so they are able to be more rigorous in their monitoring role
 - embedding the formal programme of monitoring teaching and learning
 - involving all parents more actively in the learning journey of their child
 - addressing staffing issues so these do not impact on the learning and progress of pupils.