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7 October 2010

Miss J Mitchell  
Acting Headteacher  
Sandside Lodge School  
Sandside Road  
Ulverston  
Cumbria  
LA12 9EF

Dear Miss Mitchell

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Sandside Lodge School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 October 2010 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks also to the vice-chair of the governing body and to the Senior School Improvement Officer for their time and comments.

Several changes since the inspection in January, some very recent, have had a significant impact. A new Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body were appointed following the resignation in the summer term of the former Chair. The local authority placed an experienced senior leader in the school from September to support the leadership team in the absence of an assistant headteacher and she took over the leadership of the school following the resignation of the substantive headteacher in late September. The local authority has arranged for the headteacher of another special school to provide support. The senior leadership team has been restructured with some staff in acting leadership roles while two members of the leadership team are absent from school. Sandside has opened links with Green Lane Special School in Warrington which was judged to be outstanding in its last inspection. Since September, sixth form students have been going to Ulverston Victoria High School for some taught sessions.

As a result of the inspection on 19 and 20 January 2010, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The pace of progress has quickened markedly since the start of the autumn term. The intensive action of the last two weeks has partly compensated for the lack of consistent progress in the previous terms. The appointment of the acting headteacher has been an impetus to concerted action and she has done much in a very short time to establish clear expectations and agreed working practices. Morale has risen; staff welcome consultation with and direction from her. There is an acceptance that things need to change and a tangible commitment to working together to achieve it. The acting headteacher has revised the management structure, as well as management and administrative procedures in order to draw on staff expertise and to widen the burden of responsibility and accountability. Senior staff are clear about what is expected of them. Governance has strengthened; the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body have a clear understanding of the school's situation and work closely with school leaders. Governors are monitoring and questioning how well the action plan is being followed. These steps forward have increased the school's potential to do what is needed this term to improve further the effectiveness of leadership and management and to ensure that the improvement is sustained.

Having carried out her own review, the acting headteacher is acutely aware that dealing with the areas for improvement is more complex than it appears. Some working practices, for example, detract from a unified sense of purpose and from meeting the needs of all pupils. Two such are the marked split in the provision for the younger and the older pupils, and the lack of a consistent emphasis on enabling all pupils to do the best they can academically. As at the time of the inspection, pupils enjoy school; they participate in sessions and behave well. The staff's commitment to the pupils is not in doubt and there is a high level of pastoral care and concern. However, there are few examples of pupils' work displayed in school and little to celebrate publicly their academic achievement. There is considerable scope to enrich the learning environment to reflect current topics and to make optimal use of resources, such as small whiteboards and cards which could enable all pupils to show their answers in response to the adults' questions. The school is well placed to draw on its links with other schools and to involve consultants from the local authority in sharing effective practice. The monitoring of teaching and learning since January has given staff a clear overview of what works well. It has not always focused sharply enough on how well the pupils learn nor on how well staff have acted on previously agreed points for improvement.

There has been good progress in developing systems to track pupils' progress. The coordinator has, with the support of the local authority, introduced a computerised system, trained others in its use and used the potential of the program to analyse and to compare the school's data with national figures. This has given staff a clear overview of each pupil's progress and prompted questions about the rate of progress in different subjects and times of the week. Teaching staff now have a growing and sound basis from which to decide whether pupils' targets are challenging enough and what counts as 'good progress' for individuals.

Given the restructuring of the senior leadership team, it is an opportune time to clarify the school's priorities in the short and longer term and to rewrite the school improvement plan. The current plan is too disparate and disjointed to be a helpful, working document. Much of the content refers to tasks that are integral to posts of responsibility. The plan gives little indication of the difference that planned actions will make to the overall quality of the provision or to pupils' achievement.

The local authority has followed the content of its satisfactory statement of action. The school has benefited from support in updating procedures and required systems regarding the safeguarding and welfare of pupils. The local authority's recent evaluation of the school's progress was thorough and balanced. It raised some pertinent and critical points as well as recognising where action had been productive. The reports from the School Improvement Partner and other personnel have not given the same level of critical challenge to ensure the school is secure in evaluating how well pupils are achieving and the factors that account for differences.

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

Sonja Øyen  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010:**

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - the school's senior leadership team works with a unified sense of purpose to develop a shared commitment to improvement amongst all staff
  - systems for monitoring school performance are robust and rigorously applied
  - the governing body provides the necessary challenge to senior leaders to bring about improvement.
- Improve learning and progress for pupils of all abilities by ensuring that all teaching makes effective use of assessment so that the needs of all pupils are met consistently.