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Mr Pugh
Headteacher
Oaklands Park School
John Nash Drive
Dawlish
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EX7 9SF

Dear Mr Pugh

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Oaklands Park School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff 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. Please especially thank the Chair of the Governing Body and the staff who gave up their time to speak to me.

Since the last inspection the school has benefited from a major building programme. This is nearing completion, with pupils already using the improved educational and boarding facilities.

As a result of the inspection on 4--5 March 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

good progress in making improvements

and

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



There have been improvements in pupils' achievement since the last inspection. Pupils in Years 10 to 13 benefit from a much wider range of opportunities, such as to work alongside their peers from mainstream and other special schools. Examples include cookery lessons at a local youth centre and work experience at a garden centre. These opportunities enable pupils to make better progress in learning skills they will be able to use in the adult world, such as social and communication skills. Within the school, pupils take more responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. They make choices about the activities they pursue and manage their own behaviour, for example by recognising when they might lose control and requesting a 'time out' opportunity. This enables learning in the class to proceed in a calm atmosphere so that other learners continue to make effective progress, and was seen in classes of learners of all ages.

With the support of the local authority, the school subscribes to a body that collects and analyses data on the attainment and progress of young people in special schools, and sets realistic but challenging targets for their future progress. This analysis shows that the attainment of pupils in English and science is now similar to that in mathematics. Most pupils are meeting or exceeding the targets set, and where this is not the case there is an explanation, such as a medical crisis. This improved progress in English and science was observed in lessons, as when pupils in Years 2 to 8 could use rhyming words to write a simple poem, and in Year 10 where pupils gave clear descriptions of hidden objects.

There is now a much broader range of accreditation available to pupils in Years 10, 11 and beyond. These include programmes such as 'Moving On' and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), which offer opportunities to accredit functional skills such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, as well as work-related skills such as cookery. Students enjoy these courses, as seen when the inspector was enthusiastically shown a computer-based slide show of the class cookery activities. Pupils also have opportunities for accreditation of their sporting prowess by gaining recognised qualifications in sports such as swimming and canoeing. These courses reflect higher aspirations and expectations on the part of staff; however, in some cases, especially the ASDAN programme, development is at an early stage and staff are currently testing out the range of courses that pupils are able to access.

Teaching has improved because of teachers' raised expectations, better use of assessment to plan work and astute use of teaching assistants. For example, in a lesson for Years 2 to 5, teaching assistants supported individuals or pairs of pupils on sustained tasks to minimise potential conflict between pupils. At the end of the lesson the teacher brought the whole group together so that each pupil could explain their work to the rest of the group. The teacher modelled a very high expectation of social interaction and behaviour between pupils, to which they responded very well.



The school meets all requirements to safeguard pupils. It received an Ofsted inspection of the quality of social care in March 2010. This found that the areas for improvement in social care identified in the inspection of March 2009 had been carried out effectively. While the March 2010 inspection identified no required actions for the school, it made a number of further recommendations. The school provided evidence on this occasion that these recommendations had also been carried out successfully.

The range of improvements that have taken place since the last inspection include improved teaching, assessment and curriculum, leading to wider opportunities and improved achievement by pupils. These improvements have been driven by a more focused approach to self-evaluation and strategic planning, involving increased challenge by, and for, both senior leaders and the governing body, aided by effective support from the local authority. In turn, these improvements reflect the school's better capacity for further improvement.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul Sadler", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Paul Sadler
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the achievement of all pupils in English and science so that it matches that in mathematics.
- Improve teaching and support to ensure that pupils of all ages, and particularly those in the sixth form, do more for themselves in lessons and around the school.
- Develop more opportunities particularly for pupils in Years 10 and 11 to achieve accredited qualifications.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- Ensure that recruitment practice and procedures always comply with all the components of National Minimum Standard 27 (National Minimum Standard 27).
- Ensure that written procedural guidance for staff on safeguarding includes guidance on recording (National Minimum Standard 5).
- Ensure that food hygiene procedures are always followed when food is being served (National Minimum Standard 15).