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3 February 2011

Mr P Carolan  
Headteacher  
Birtenshaw School  
Darwen Road  
Bromley Cross  
Bolton  
Lancashire  
BL7 9AB

Dear Mr Carolan,

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Birtenshaw School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 2 February 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please convey my thanks to the staff and pupils and also to your Chair of Governors and School Improvement Partner, both of whom I talked to on the telephone.

Since the last inspection one teacher has left the school and has not been replaced. A teaching assistant who left the school has been replaced. Three new members of the governing body have been appointed. There have been six pupils placed at the school in the last five terms and the school roll stands at 14 pupils. The school provides for pupils from eight local authorities including Bolton, its host local authority. Funding for a new building has been confirmed and the headteacher reports that building work should commence in the next two months and should be completed early in 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 12 and 13 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 good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The progress the pupils make is most evident in their personal and social skills where good strides are made in readying the pupils for more formal learning. Because the systems the school has introduced are helping settle pupils and getting them to engage with others, staff are also starting to see increased rates of progress in pupils' academic learning. The challenging behaviours many pupils exhibit diminish because of the effective way staff manage behaviour. Continuous recording systems enable staff to get to know the pupils very well indeed and they use this knowledge to provide suitable challenges for the pupils.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The school has made progress in gathering data on the academic progress pupils make. Arrangements are in place to regularly assess pupils' learning and to validate these assessments through moderation meetings with teachers from other schools. The reliability of this data is therefore assured. However, the limited amount of data collected so far does not allow the school to analyse them for patterns and trends. The headteacher recognises that the next step is to compare this information with data for similar pupils nationally so that the school can check that the progress pupils are making is good enough. The school has a good range of data to show the progress made in pupils' personal and social developments. This is being enhanced further by a promising behaviour recording system.

The governing body is a committee of the board of trustees. The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of two parent governors and a new chair of governors. The Chair of the Governing Body and the headteacher have set in place mechanisms for the governors to be better informed about the school. The chair recently joined the Chief Executive of the Charitable Trust in making a successful presentation to the local authority's planning committee for approval for new buildings. This shows that the governors are ready to take their part in leading the strategic direction of the school. Governance of the school has notably improved since the last inspection and the governing body is in a promising position to fulfil its role as a critical friend of the school in holding it to account.

The introduction of individual learning plans and targets for pupils, alongside regular recording and assessment of their progress, has helped redress the imbalance between the time spent on care and education. Expectations of what pupils can achieve academically have risen as a result. The school is now rightly more focused on the progress pupils make but has retained effective care and support arrangements. The school development plan has been a useful tool in shifting this focus. It effectively marries an emphasis on priorities for both the care and education of the pupils. However, it could be even more useful if it were to incorporate measurable targets about the achievements of pupils and improvements to the quality of teaching. This is now possible because of the data the school has about the progress pupils are making and the planned introduction of formal teaching observations as part of performance management for staff.

The governing body has picked up the gauntlet from the last inspection and has made the professional development of staff a priority. This is reflected well in the school's training plans and records. These show a range of internal and external training opportunities have been taken up by staff and have been geared toward teaching and learning as well as safeguarding and care. It is notable, for example, that all eligible teaching assistants have embarked on NVQ training at Level 3 in supporting teaching and learning and that training has been provided internally on autistic spectrum disorder, which is an increasing characteristic of many pupils' needs.

Despite being a non-maintained school, effective links have been developed with Bolton local authority. For example, the governing body has purchased support from the local authority's governor support team. The school has received good support from its School

Improvement Partner who has an accurate view of the school and has signposted the headteacher to good practice elsewhere. The school's review of its behaviour management arrangements was well informed by a member of the child and adolescent mental health service from the primary care trust.

Alongside the successful work of the headteacher and staff in pushing forward positive changes to the school's practices, recent alterations to the governing body have contributed to the school showing an improved capacity to make further improvements. The headteacher has prepared well the foundations for the school to improve further and has an accurate view of the school's immediate priorities.

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

Mr Eric Craven  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## **Annex**

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

- Ensure that the data collected about students' work is used to better effect to measure how well they are doing over a number of years.
- Ensure that members of the governing body provide a good level of challenge to senior leaders by being more fully involved in evaluating the school.
- Ensure that all of the time available for teaching is used fully.
- Increase the staff's teaching knowledge and skills by increased access to appropriate training.