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22 March 2011

Mr T Bennett
Headteacher
Windlestone School
Chilton
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DL17 0HP

Dear Mr Bennett,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Windlestone School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I was sorry that no member of the governing body was available to talk with me, but please convey my thanks to those staff and students whom I met in lessons and around the school during the day

Since the previous inspection, staffing and the governing body have remained fairly stable. A new assistant headteacher was appointed to take charge of the two special needs alternative provision units (SNAP), currently located on separate sites, in January 2011. Two new teaching staff have been appointed; one in English and one in science. There has also been a small number of changes to the support staff in school.

As a result of the inspection on the 10 and 11 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.

Attainment remains low, which is typical for a school of this type. However, there have been improving trends in attainment since 2008, which includes English and mathematics. The overall rate of the students' progress also shows signs of progress in all Key Stage 4 indicators, most especially in the proportion achieving at least one pass at GCSE or its equivalent level.

The school is satisfactorily improving its quality of teaching, in particular, in addressing the improvement area from the previous inspection, which asked that all teachers make their learning objectives clearer, and that they provide a range of lesson content more suited to

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the ability range in the class. In all lessons seen during this monitoring inspection, lessons were characterised by the sharing of learning objectives with the students at the start of the lesson. This was effective in identifying what the teacher expected the students to learn, but was occasionally written in 'teacher speak' rather than in a language than the students could more readily understand and apply to their own work. Also, some of the lesson objectives focused on completion of tasks and gave too little indication of the intended learning outcomes in terms of new knowledge or skills, or greater understanding from previous or new work. However, some teachers have achieved the ability to articulate clear lesson objectives through easy and accessible language. For example, in one Year 8 English lesson, the teacher skilfully engaged the students in a general discussion, which included information about new work within a framework of what they had previously learned. Lesson activities generally match well with the students' identified capabilities. The school was also asked to ensure that the students' progress was regularly assessed against objectives in their individual student plans. Overall, the school has improved significantly in the quality and regularity of collecting students' assessment information.

The quality of teachers' marking is also improving. Where it is good, the teacher provides carefully crafted comments about the quality of the work achieved, most often linking it to the level achieved. However, there are too few comments about how the student could improve upon the work further and too infrequently do teachers challenge the poor presentation of work from some students.

The school has responded positively to the issue raised in the previous inspection that it should promote writing across the curriculum. The school documentation makes clear how it intends to promote not only writing but all aspects of literacy within the school. Most teachers reflect this increasing awareness in their lesson planning, but only in the most effective lessons do teachers clarify exactly what the students will learn rather than what the teacher will cover.

The recommendation from the previous inspection that all topic work should be planned more effectively has been fully resolved by the school removing this type of work from the curriculum. All subjects are now discrete in nature and planned as such, although teachers are very aware of aspects of basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, as part of the cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning throughout the school.

The school has continued to promote its links with the local community, as part of its promotion of community cohesion. There is a developing awareness and provision for the students to engage in a range of different community-based activities and events, for example, through curricular work on its farm and through out-of-school visits. International work has developed quickly, and this makes a positive contribution to the overall quality of the curricular provision. However, senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, have yet to carry out an audit of the quality of its provision for community cohesion, as a basis for identifying the key priorities for further action within the whole school. In particular, there are few specific actions relating to an appreciation of the different religious,

ethnic and social mix of the area that the schools serves or where the students live, or how these aspects are different at regional, national or global levels.

During the inspection visit, two safeguarding issues were identified and shared with senior leaders and managers. Firstly, the entrance door into the SNAP unit at Framwellgate Moor Community Centre has no security lock to prevent unauthorised access, and was unlocked when the inspector visited. Also, a practical 'weight training' session in this SNAP unit, using free-standing weights, had no written risk assessment or lesson plan. The room where this activity is undertaken is also relatively small and not entirely appropriate for this type of activity. All other safeguarding procedures and processes are in place, including the single central register, which contains details of all adults who work or regularly visit the school.

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 Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 10-11 November 2009

- Ensure a consistent approach to the planning of teaching and learning so that:
 - all lessons are characterised by clear identification of learning objectives closely matched to the needs and abilities of individual students
 - a range of activities is provided to enable all students to meet these objectives
 - progress in relation to objectives is regularly assessed and matched to individual student plans.
- Plan more thoroughly the ways in which writing can be more effectively promoted across the whole curriculum so as to contribute more to the raising of standards in English.
- Coordinate the planning for topic work more effectively so as to clearly identify which areas of learning are being served in lessons.
- Introduce more cohesive planning for the ways in which the school can contribute most effectively to community cohesion.