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Mr D Spencer
The Wyvern School (Buxford)
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Dear Mr Spencer

Ofsted monitoring of schools with no formal designation

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Janet Thompson HMI on 21 June 2011 and for the information which you provided during our visit. Please extend my thanks to the pupils, who spoke with us and showed us their work, and to the two representatives from the local authority with whom we spoke.

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors in response to complaints made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. These were deemed to be qualifying complaints that warranted further consideration under Ofsted's powers to investigate complaints about schools. As a result of the investigation Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to evaluate pupils' well-being and safety, including the management of their behaviour and their physical needs.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that pupils' wellbeing is adequate and the school has appropriate procedures to keep them safe. There are some weaknesses in the quality of support that staff give to pupils to help them to manage and improve their own behaviour. However, the school has recently started to make satisfactory progress in tackling these aspects. Senior leaders are developing a strategic view of issues that is usefully beginning to inform practice. The actions that the headteacher and heads of education have taken so far and their appropriate written plans for the next steps demonstrate that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils, are largely positive. Pupils appear to be relaxed both in lessons and during unstructured times, and they relate well to teachers and teaching assistants. When pupils are given interesting opportunities to learn they respond well and try hard to concentrate.

Both sites of the school had a calm atmosphere throughout the inspection. Routines are clear, for example, when pupils move from one area of the school to another they know what to expect and what is expected of them. Lunchtimes for all age groups were calm and pleasant. At break-times pupils played co-operatively with each other or chatted together in pairs or groups. Staff helped younger pupils to learn new play skills, and older pupils were supported to interact positively with each other as needed. The high ratio of staff to pupils results in a suitable level of supervision to keep pupils safe. Individual pupils' records are used to ensure that welfare concerns are followed up with appropriate partners. The school is committed to involving parents more fully in their children's education and the life of the school. The school's written plans reflect a commitment to exploring the most suitable ways of doing this.

The school has recently updated its behaviour management policy. This has some useful elements but does not fully reflect current government guidance and is not altogether suitable for the school's current population. The local authority's recent review has crucially highlighted to the school the need to ensure that staff feel confident to intervene appropriately with pupils, including to ensure their physical safety. The school has begun to consider these important recommendations as a whole staff. Almost all the longer-established staff have recently completed appropriate training to refresh their skills in using physical intervention, and newer staff have completed their initial training in this aspect.

The management of pupils' behaviour is not consistent, either across the two sites or from lesson to lesson. In lessons, pupils' behaviour was generally at least satisfactory. Where pupils did not engage with the lesson, staff re-engaged most of them appropriately. However, at times the tasks, pace or style of delivery did not meet all the pupils' needs, which meant that some were not able to take a full part in the lesson and became distracted. At other times pupils chose not to take part in the activity, but were not challenged appropriately by staff to return to their learning.

The development of communication skills does not sufficiently underpin the management of behaviour and there is no consistent approach to developing the communication skills of pupils who have more complex needs. For example, although inspectors observed some use of visual cues and communication aids, this was not widespread, neither was it consistent across different times of the day. Staff did not always adapt their language appropriately to the needs or ages of the pupils.

The school has individual behaviour management plans for a number of pupils. Some include suitable strategies but others are either too complex or insufficiently specific. Senior and middle leaders do not monitor the success of these plans sufficiently rigorously. The school keeps a range of detailed documents to record different types of incidents. However there is no clear policy about what type of incident should be recorded in which document. Moreover there is no strategic overview of the different records. There is therefore no analysis of patterns of

behaviour for individual pupils or across the school to allow well-targeted actions to be taken.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector