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Miss Catherine Marsh
Headteacher
Riverside Community Special School
Scratchface Lane
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Waterlooville
Hampshire
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Dear Miss Marsh

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Riverside Community Special School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 October 2011, for the time you gave to our telephone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection.

There have been a number of changes since the previous inspection. A new headteacher took up post in September 2010, when a new Key Stage 1 manager was also appointed. A new teacher of the Early Years Foundation Stage class also took up post at that time, but she left at the end of the school year and was replaced by a newly qualified teacher in September 2011. The number of pupils on the school roll has reduced by approximately 10% since the previous inspection. A newly established facility has been created to enhance the provision for pupils with autism by enabling them to be withdrawn, either individually or in small groups, for more intensive work.

As a result of the inspection on 26 and 27 May 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The headteacher has made a significant difference in a relatively short time. In particular, she has overseen the introduction of rigour into the school's work, developed an ethos of challenge, and established a culture of high expectation of both pupils and staff. This has been achieved through a combination of clear and focused leadership and the implementation of robust management systems. This systematic approach towards school self-evaluation provides leaders with secure information about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, there is demonstrable improvement in aspects of the school's work, indicating a strengthening capacity to maintain the thrust for improvement.

A planned programme of lesson observations and staff development is raising the standard of teaching. While a minority of lessons are satisfactory, teaching is now more typically good. Staff have good subject knowledge and they manage pupils' behaviour effectively, using praise and encouragement well to retain pupils' interest and motivation. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are now learning more effectively; evidence shows that their progress is accelerating and their attainment and achievement are rising securely. Furthermore, procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision have been strengthened. Monitoring is routine and evaluative, and it makes an important contribution to children getting far more opportunities to engage in planned imaginative play activities.

The school is not in a position to make an accurate judgement of the progress made by pupils during the year 2010/11. This is because leaders felt that they could not confirm with any confidence the accuracy of assessment data that was gathered in July 2010. Therefore, any attempts to measure the progress made by individuals between then and July 2011 are potentially invalid. The position now is much improved. The introduction of a more robust approach to assessment procedures, in the summer term of 2011, including internal moderation exercises, adds reliability to teachers' assessments of pupils' and children's achievements. As a result, the school is now securely in a position to set pupils suitably challenging individual targets, so that individual needs are better met. Very recently established individual pupil tracking files, and Learning Journeys in the Early Years Foundation Stage, enable teachers to track pupils' progress towards meeting their targets using ongoing assessment information. Leaders monitor these documents to maintain oversight of pupils' progress and to initiate individual packages of support if required.

There has not yet been time for changes to assessment and target-setting procedures to have had a significant impact on improving outcomes for pupils. Nonetheless, the changes mean that the school is developing a good capacity to improve. The same is true for changes to teachers' lesson plans, particularly in the extent to which staff use assessment information to plan for accelerated learning. Plans tend to have too much detail, focusing more on what teachers intend to do rather than on what pupils are expected to learn, other than in broad terms. Teachers do not routinely indicate exactly which new skills or knowledge individuals



or groups of pupils are expected to acquire through independent learning activities, building on what they have previously learned.

The governing body is involved fully in the school's recent developments. For instance, it approved expenditure on new play equipment for the Early Years Foundation Stage and the costs incurred by staff visiting high quality provision elsewhere, and it monitored improvements in this phase through a presentation made by the teacher and Key Stage 1 manager. The local authority played its part, too, via the input of the School Improvement Partner, who contributed to school self-evaluation by providing challenge and celebrating successes well. However, she also recognises circumstances that have hindered the pace of development. As recently as July 2011, she commented on the fact that a high rate of staff absence hampered faster improvement in establishing consistently high quality teaching in all lessons. Staffing is now far more stable and as such, the school is in a strong position to move forward. In this respect, it has built a good capacity to improve. There is a solid foundation of good quality practice and effective and ambitious leaders, who have shown themselves capable of raising standards and as having the ability to maintain a momentum of change.

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

Mike Kell
Additional Inspector



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010.

- Improve the provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage by ensuring that staff drive children's learning more effectively through purposeful play activities.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage through more rigorous monitoring of the provision.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers' planning in all lessons clearly identifies the needs of pupils and how these will be met
 - ensuring that teachers' judgements about progress and attainment are consistent across the school, notably in the Early Years Foundation Stage.