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13 December 2007

Mrs Alison Kahn
Headteacher
Fred Nicholson School
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Dear Mrs Kahn

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 December 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please would you thank the chair of governors and the local authority for meeting with me. Since the previous inspection the school has opened Orchard House, an Autistic Spectrum Disorder resource base to meet the needs of five pupils and support other pupils in local schools. A new senior leadership team is in place and the school is preparing an application for specialist status.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 June 2006, the school was asked to:

- improve the quality of the boarding provision to meet National Care Standards and provide up to date domestic style accommodation
- improve the quality of teaching to that of the best by more effective planning and individual pupils' targets
- raise standards and achievements at Key Stages 3 and 4 by more effectively evaluating and using information about how well pupils are making progress
- provide appropriate information for governors to more rigorously monitor the school's effectiveness.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Satisfactory progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Performance management arrangements include a programme of lesson monitoring and regular scrutiny of teachers' lesson planning. The school's own records show that whilst a small amount of ineffective teaching remains, a number of teachers have demonstrated significant improvement and most lessons are now satisfactory or better. Two joint observations carried out by HMI and senior teachers confirmed the rigour of the school's monitoring procedures and agreed that lessons were satisfactory. Positive relations between staff and pupils help to support effective behaviour management. Pupils appreciate the praise they receive for making contributions in lessons or producing good work, and they generally enjoy their lessons. Teachers' planning is now focused on what they want pupils to learn and includes probing questions to check pupils' understanding, but this is not yet consistent across all subjects. Not all planning includes different tasks to challenge the most able and at times, some pupils are not sufficiently stretched to work as hard as they can. Less progress has been made in ensuring targets for improvement expressed in pupils' individual education plans (IEP's) are fully addressed in all lessons. The setting of homework for those pupils who would benefit from additional study remains patchy.

Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress given their abilities and starting points when they enter the school. In Key Stages 3 and 4 in 2007, fewer pupils were entered for GCSE art or mathematics but the number of pupils making progress and attaining entry level awards improved. Pupils say that they feel they are making progress in their lessons and a scrutiny of pupils' work sampled during lesson observations supports this. The school fell short of meeting all pupil targets contained in their IEPs, but this is mainly because some targets remain unrealistic and unattainable. A satisfactory start has been made in improving the use of data to track how well pupils are doing. The school has extended its use of Pivats and B-Squared assessment schemes to gather information on pupils' progress and is working with the local authority to make further improvements to its assessment procedures so that it can compare its performance with other similar schools. This is at an early stage of development and needs more time to become firmly established.

Governors remain very supportive of the school and the headteacher. They have a better range of information provided for them including improved self-evaluation and clear headteacher reports to help them monitor the school's effectiveness. They are aware of the progress pupils make against their IEP targets but until the new assessment procedures become firmly embedded they are not yet able to thoroughly evaluate the attainment and progress of all pupils. Improvements have been made to the boarding accommodation and are recognised in the last CSCI inspection in January 2007. Pupils' privacy has improved by providing curtains between beds and new furniture in the lounge provides a much more homely environment. Bathrooms have been refurbished to provide clean, up to date facilities. Some pupils have decorated their bedside areas with posters and their own belongings but this is not the case in all dormitories and some remain rather spartan. The stairwells still have

an institutional feel due to the lack of carpets. The local authority and governors make regular visits to monitor the quality of provision and also to act as independent listeners to pupils if they have concerns.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector