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Mr Michael Loveman
The Headteacher
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Dear Michael

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 January 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors and all the staff who gave up their time to talk to me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 5 December 2006, the school was asked to:

- accelerate the pace of school development
- track pupils' progress more effectively and use the data to set challenging targets
- improve the quality of education for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD).
- ensure that the residential hostel meets all minimum national care standards.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress.

The senior management team has achieved much over the last year and the pace of change has been good. There has been recognition of this through a number of awards including the Basic Skills Award in both the secondary and primary phases, Active Sportsmark and the intermediate International School Award. Much has been done in developing the role of the school within the local authority. A satellite site has been successfully established at a local primary school and negotiations are in progress to move the school to a mainstream site. The good team work of the senior management team has ensured that

change has been brought about successfully by ensuring that staff are involved in decisions and well supported. An example of this is the improvements that have been made to how teachers plan what pupils should learn. Staff have worked closely together and, whilst there are still refinements to come, the format used by staff is more consistent in ensuring that the needs of individuals are met.

The school's improvement plan recognises areas for development over the next three years. However, the document is unwieldy because it tries to cover every improvement regardless of how minor. As a result, it is difficult for the school to be clear about the progress it is making, particularly in addressing the most important areas. A review of the plan is due to take place at the end of this term and senior staff intend to focus on the key elements for improving the school over the next three years. The school has had very little external support over the last year. Senior staff have welcomed the recent appointment of a School Improvement Partner who will provide support to enable them to check that they are moving in the right direction.

Senior staff have worked hard to improve the tracking of pupils' progress and have made satisfactory progress in setting challenging targets. Over the last year they have placed a great deal of importance on checking that teachers' assessments are accurate and have put into place good procedures to address weaknesses. Most teachers set clear lesson objectives for pupils, linked to their targets. For example, in a good lesson for the oldest pupils there was a clear indication in the plan of how staff would help individuals to achieve their numeracy objectives. The school recognises that at present pupils have too many targets and these need to be reduced to enable teachers to track pupils' progress more effectively. The school is putting in place a system next term to ensure that target setting is more robust and pupils are challenged appropriately. However, staff have been hampered in developing more effective systems to analyse data about achievement because the local authority's assessment programme has not yet come on line. This is due to be in place later this year.

A considerable amount of time and support has been provided in order to improve the provision for PMLD pupils. Specialist teaching support has been brought in. Senior staff have monitored teaching regularly and provided training for teachers and support staff. However, the impact of this has been limited and progress to date has been inadequate in improving provision. The format for planning what pupils will learn during the day has been improved but lacks detail. It does not, for example, make clear the range of objectives for the lessons or indicate how pupils' skills will be developed. Improvements have been made through the introduction of a new curriculum which follows an accredited course and the school feels that the breadth of the curriculum is better. However, links are not made between activities to ensure that pupils will gain a range of experiences matched to their various needs. Technology is insufficiently used to widen pupils' experiences and opportunities are missed to provide a range of sensory experiences. Photographs record what pupils have done, but limited annotation means that it is not clear what pupils have gained

from the activities. The school is very aware of the deficiencies within the provision for these pupils. There is now only a very small number of PMLD pupils and the school is looking at the viability of maintaining provision for this group of pupils beyond the summer term.

The school's hostel was re-inspected in July 2007 by Ofsted Child Care Inspectors and achieved 15 out of the 21 targets set at the previous inspection. Although judged satisfactory in many aspects of its work, key areas in safeguarding and ongoing staffing issues resulted in its overall quality being judged inadequate. Effective action, including the secondment to the school of a specialist consultant in social care, has enabled the school to address all the issues raised. It is now awaiting the next inspection.

The school staff and hostel staff work closely together but there is no formal structure to ensure that work in school, such as that covered in personal, social and health education, are shared and supported by the hostel. Senior staff are aware of this and are developing systems to enable more formal links to be established.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascal
Additional Inspector