

30 April 2008

Mr K Lloyd
Headteacher
Windlehurst School
Hawk Green
Marple
Stockport
SK6 7HZ

Dear Mr Lloyd

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you gave when I inspected your school on Tuesday 29 April 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to staff and students and to the chair of governors for their help and for making me welcome.

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 22 November 2006, the school was asked to address the following.

- Improve pupils' achievement by tracking their progress and personal development much more rigorously and then using this information to set challenging individual targets.
- Raise attendance by increasing the stake that pupils have in the school, for example by developing a school council.
- Improve the curriculum so that sufficient time is given each day to directly address the emotional and behavioural needs of pupils and develop important ideas such as service to the school and others.
- The headteacher, governors and staff should consult with parents, pupils and professional partners to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school and give high priority to carrying out plans for improvement.

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

Conditions at the school have become more challenging than they were at the time of the inspection. Students present behaviours that are more difficult to manage than at any time previously, a trend noted in the inspection that has continued. In

addition, the long-term absence of a member of staff and the lack of success of short-term replacement teachers has necessitated senior staff taking on additional pastoral and teaching loads to cover the absence. These additional loads are borne mainly by the headteacher.

Students' achievement as judged by their results in national tests continues to be at least satisfactory and better than this in some respects. It compares favourably with the performance of similar schools elsewhere and students make good progress in relation to their starting points at 11 years of age. On leaving the school, all students go on to further education, employment or training. In 2007 all six students who took GCSEs gained passes in English, mathematics, science and art, and three students gained good grades. Students have most success in science.

Students' achievement in the lessons observed during the visit was generally less positive than the national test results indicate. It was sometimes unsatisfactory. Sometimes this was due to poor attitudes on the part of the students, but sometimes it was because the pace of lessons was too slow and tasks were undemanding. Students themselves felt they could achieve more if more were asked of them and if a high level of expectation was maintained.

Teamwork throughout the school is a significant strength, as is the quality of relationships between staff and students. Teaching assistants play a valued part in the work of the school, hugely appreciated by teachers and students. The degree to which teaching assistants support students in their learning within subjects and the emphasis they place on their pastoral role varies considerably. The time is right to establish a teaching and learning policy that clarifies the role of the teaching assistants so that a greater degree of consistency and expectation may be achieved.

Students' behaviour is challenging by any standard because of the nature of their emotional and behavioural special needs. It is usually handled well by senior staff, teachers and teaching assistants. Some students' unpredictable behaviour creates at times an uneasy ethos in the school, counterbalanced to a large degree by the calm professionalism of staff in dealing with issues and their clear commitment to the well-being of students.

Levels of attendance have not improved significantly since the inspection, and at any time around one quarter of the students are absent. Largely, this is because a minority of students have very poor attendance records. Levels of exclusions are too high. This is a particular cause for concern since the school represents what is often the last opportunity these students have to be engaged in full-time education. The transport arrangements are another particular concern. Students arrive at school in mini-buses, with up to eight students in the same bus, younger students along with older ones. So great is the likelihood of students arriving at school distressed that the first session of the morning is spent in calming students in tutor groups. Although this is an effective strategy it means opportunities to promote a sense of school unity, or for students to get off to a prompt start with learning, cannot be taken.

The school has made progress in establishing a clear set of expectations for students' behaviour in lessons. These are generally consistently applied and lead to students

earning merits for positive behaviour and having clear targets to achieve. However, although the school measures student's academic performance at key points such as when they begin school and at the end of each key stage, the tracking and targeting process envisaged in the first area for improvement has not materialised. An assessment package to do this has been bought in but has not been implemented.

Several initiatives are in place to make the curriculum more relevant to students' needs and to raise the levels of expertise of staff. Foremost among these are implementing the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme and a coaching programme whereby experienced members of staff mentor less experienced ones. In addition, other initiatives to develop students' handwriting by improving their coordination, and to provide opportunities for students to follow personalised computer-based courses of study in mathematics and English have also been introduced. Students recognise the efforts of staff to make their lessons more relevant, but say that initiatives are not always sustained. They instanced the school council as an initiative that was not, in their opinion, fulfilling its original potential.

The school works effectively with a number of partners, including the Connexions Service, and with a range of consultants and agencies from the local authority, including the Youth Offending Team. It works with partners in the statutory, voluntary and independent sector to enrich the experience of students and promote their well-being. However, the school reports difficulty in accessing some services for its students, particularly those concerned with promoting mental health.

The school's assessment of its effectiveness is not up to date and does not reflect the issues that currently face it. Improvement plans to meet the issues raised in the inspection have been drawn up, but they lack a clear focus on how students will benefit or plans to check whether actions have proved effective.

In short, the school presents now in much the same light as that recorded in the inspection report of November 2006. At the heart of the lack of progress lies a lack of effectiveness in leadership and management. It continues to be diverted by day-to-day matters and frustrated by a shortage of resources, such as those required to improve standards of interior decoration and of exterior maintenance. There is an urgent need to provide strong leadership to bring clarity, consistency and focus to the teaching and learning. Equally, strong management is required to ensure that what is decided is carried out to a successful outcome.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector