

26 September 2008

Mrs Shirley Jones
Headteacher
Millstead School
Old Mill Lane
Liverpool
Merseyside
L15 8LW

Dear Mrs Jones

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you gave when I inspected your school on 25 September 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the chair of governors, your school improvement partner, and to your staff and pupils who gave their time to speak with me.

There have been some significant changes to staffing since the inspection visit in June 2007. A new senior leadership team has been established which includes a recently appointed deputy headteacher and the internal appointment of a senior teacher. Other recent external appointments include two teachers and five teaching assistants. The school is currently seeking to fill vacancies on the governing body for a vice chair and two parent governors. Class groupings have been revised, particularly since September 2008, to enable more children with profound and multiple learning difficulties to be included in the main classes.

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 6 and 7 June 2007, the school was asked to:

- develop goals and targets to enable school leaders to evaluate the progress the school is making more robustly
- build on developments to support middle leaders in checking that learning is evaluated consistently in all subjects throughout the school
- ensure that governors meet their responsibilities in full.

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

All pupils experience severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. As a result, their standards continue to be significantly below those expected of pupils of a similar age. Pupils' attainment falls mainly within the range of P levels and the most able reach National Curriculum Level 1. Evidence from teacher assessments, the school's analysis of attainment data and classroom observations during the inspection indicate that most pupils are making steady progress in their learning and achieving well in relation to their starting points. The learning of a small number of pupils is delayed or regresses due to their medical conditions.

The curriculum has been revised to better meet the needs of pupils. It is now based on an integrated approach rather than the different National Curriculum subjects being taught in discrete sessions over the course of the week. Teaching observed during the inspection visit confirmed the school's evaluation that this is working well. At its best, it effectively engages most pupils in a range of play-based activity and enables them to receive individual teaching in literacy and numeracy. There is a strong focus on promoting pupils' speaking and listening skills and enabling them to develop their independence. In this calm, cheerful environment pupils clearly enjoy their lessons and warm to the positive and caring attention they receive from staff. Classrooms are generally well laid out to support this integrated approach. Teachers' planning shows clearly the learning objectives for each session and the expected learning outcomes for the different ability groups in each class. There is a seamless link between this curriculum planning and the assessment of individual pupils' attainment. The school has rightly identified the need to provide training for teaching assistants in classroom observation to enhance the rigour of this assessment even further. The school also plans to improve consistency in teachers' assessment by establishing a portfolio of assessed pupils' work for reference by staff, building on the practice that already takes place with other special schools across the local authority.

Systems for assessing and tracking pupils' attainment and progress in the core subjects of literacy, numeracy and science, as well as in personal and social development, are now well established. The school is regularly and carefully monitoring pupils' small steps of progress over time in these areas, based on P levels and using commercial schemes, namely PIVATS and B Squared. It is identifying at an early stage those pupils who may be underachieving and taking action to address this. The impact of this is seen in the improvements pupils then make. The school is taking appropriate steps to extend this detailed level of recording and tracking to include all subjects of the curriculum during this current academic year.

Under the strong leadership and direction of the headteacher and her senior managers, there have been significant improvements to the school's environment, the curriculum, the rigour of planning and assessment and to arrangements for monitoring the quality of the school's provision. Using its detailed analysis of data on

pupils' progress over time, the school has set appropriately challenging whole-school targets for improvement in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2. The school improvement plan identifies accurately the school's priorities and the steps it intends to take to achieve them. However, it does not make a clear link between these and the expected impact on pupils' outcomes for learning and personal development.

Governors and senior leaders make clear their high expectations and are establishing a culture of accountability at all levels. Alongside this is a strong commitment to developing staff expertise and confidence to respond to the changes being introduced. Senior leaders have a healthy outward-looking approach which enables them to evaluate the school's provision against good practice seen elsewhere and to take note of the helpful support and challenge given by the school improvement partner. The impact of this is seen in the improvements they have made in a relatively short space of time.

Following the last inspection governors and senior managers took swift action to address the safeguarding issue that was raised. The required single central register was appropriately updated to include all staff, visiting instructors, supply staff and governors. The school's policy on safeguarding pupils was revised early in 2008 and all governors and staff have received training on safeguarding and child protection. The school also introduced a number of stringent measures to improve security and visitors' access to the building. Robust arrangements are in place to promote pupils' welfare and the school benefits from having a full-time nurse on the premises to monitor pupils' health and ensure that their medical needs are attended to. The pupils are very well supervised and cared for throughout the day.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Broomhead
Her Majesty's Inspector