

19 November 2008

Mr D Lee  
Executive Principal  
Medlock Valley Community School  
Deanshut Road  
Fitton Hill  
Oldham  
Lancashire  
OL8 2PN

Dear Mr Lee

#### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 November 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the local authority (LA), members of the governing body and to all the pupils and staff I met throughout the day.

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 23 and 24 October 2007, the school was asked to:

- raise standards in English and mathematics, especially at Key Stage 2
- improve the quality of teaching and learning through the school so that it is at least good
- ensure that new methods of working are implemented consistently and evaluate their effectiveness on improving pupils' progress.

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

Following the previous inspection the school, supported well by the LA, has entered into a federation with a neighbouring primary school. New positions have been created with the appointment of an executive principal, a head of school and a governing body that presides over the work of both schools. Since their appointment at the beginning of term, senior leaders have provided strong and decisive leadership and have gained the confidence and trust of the school community. As a

result the pace of change has accelerated, significant steps to prioritise actions have been taken and there is a strong momentum for improving the school. In spearheading this work, senior leaders have successfully ensured that the needs of pupils are paramount and that efforts have been clearly focused on raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching and learning. This means that the legacy of underachievement is being tackled more decisively and there is greater acceptance of the collective responsibility for driving the work to raise standards.

In response to some on-going concerns about the challenging behaviour of a significant minority of pupils, new guidelines have been introduced recently. As a consequence, staff are able to manage pupils' behaviour more consistently in lessons and, for the most part, pupils know where they stand. Pupils are more positive about their school and say that many things have improved in recent weeks. 'In the past if one person was messing about we all got into trouble but that doesn't happen and it's much fairer now.' was a typical comment.

Pupils' current work, together with the school's own data, shows that there are signs of better progress on the part of some pupils: standards are beginning to rise. Results from the national tests this year indicate that there are increasing numbers of pupils achieving the levels expected of them at Year 2 and Year 6, particularly in mathematics. This is because the school has successfully introduced several new strategies to raise pupils' achievement, which in turn are leading to improvements in classroom practice. The planning of lessons is more focused on what pupils will learn. There are clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make and staff are beginning to take greater responsibility for their own practice. As a result the school is better placed to judge how well pupils are achieving and plan appropriate support. Furthermore, teachers are gaining confidence in judging the level of pupils' work. Although not yet consistent in all classes, they have a stronger understanding of using assessments to judge what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. Nevertheless, standards for the higher achieving pupils are not yet high enough. This is because the level of challenge in some lessons is variable which means that some pupils do not always achieve as well or as rapidly as they should. In addition, senior leaders are correct in identifying that the progress pupils make in writing is not as rapid as it is in reading. This is because many of the school's new initiatives to accelerate progress have not had sufficient time to make a significant difference to their achievement.

The quality of teaching and learning is beginning to improve and is increasing the progress pupils make in lessons. The whole-school focus on training and developing teachers' awareness of effective practice in learning is increasing the opportunities for pupils to become more engaged and work independently in lessons. 'We used to just write everything down. Now we do more practical things and can talk to one another about our work.' was a typical comment from a pupil. Much of this improvement, although not consistent in all lessons, is down to the strengthening of the way in which the school checks on the quality of teaching and judges the effectiveness of learning. Procedures are sharper and more succinct. Observations of teaching by senior staff are accurate and focus effectively on the progress pupils

have made at the end of lessons. Staff are well supported and are provided with clear guidance on how to improve their practice. In the best lessons, activities are well chosen, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and work hard. Learning is fun and pupils are given every opportunity to discuss and share their ideas with others. For example, pupils in a Year 6 lesson were able to test and deepen their knowledge of healthy eating and the importance of maintaining a balanced diet in lively repartee with their teacher who focused their attention well with games and practical activities. Where teaching is less successful, tasks are less engaging, the range of teaching styles is too narrow, which means that pupils' work is sometimes over-directed, and expectations are too low. Pupils are not always encouraged to make decisions about how they learn or to think of different ways to tackle their work. As a consequence, the flow of learning becomes erratic: pupils make less progress and are not inspired by some of the activities. Where lessons lack pace or challenge, pupils' interest wanes and restlessness ensues.

Senior staff and governors are putting the concerns of the past behind them, are keen to move forward and have established a clear agenda for improving the school. Building the management capacity within the leadership team has begun with training and support. There is clear agreement that now is the time for all staff to work together in the best interests of the pupils. The leadership team is not complacent and under no illusions about the task that lies ahead. They remain forthright in their desire to see all pupils at Medlock achieve their true potential in a structured and stimulating environment. Whilst taking pride in recent improvements and setting the school on the right course, they recognise that much further work is still required.

The drive and commitment of senior leaders and the positive way the school acts upon advice has strengthened its capacity to improve further.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood  
Her Majesty's Inspector