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Mrs Rachel Davies
Headteacher
Oakfield School
Inglemire Lane
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Dear Mrs Davies

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 05 November 2009, for the time you gave to my phone call and for the information you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the students who gave up time to talk to me and to the senior members of staff with whom I held discussions.

In January 2009 an assistant headteacher was appointed. Since September 2009, students who have moderate learning difficulties, rather than emotional, behavioural or social difficulties, and those pupils who are of primary school age have been taught in a separate annex attached to a local primary school.

As a result of the inspection in October 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve assessment and tracking procedures
- improve teaching and learning by sharing best practice
- review the present staffing structure to be appropriate to current and future school needs
- analyse behaviour incidents more rigorously, to help teachers manage students more effectively
- agree a clear admissions policy with the local authority.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

In lessons observed, students' learning and progress was often good, but at times the behaviour of individual students slows down the rate of progress. Students sometimes find concentration difficult and from time to time refuse to engage in the lesson. Students' attainment remains low, though in some lessons the standard of work they were doing was better. Students feel well supported in school and say that they are given work at the right level for them to move forward in their learning.

The school has made good progress in implementing a system that can more easily track students' progress over time in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology (ICT). The new assistant headteacher has simplified the previous system so that it is much easier for staff to use. The school has a clear view of each student's starting point and current level. Managers are now in a position to be able to analyse the data as it comes in to see how well students are progressing. In this way, in time, the system should allow the school to spot where individuals, or groups of students, are not doing as well as they should. The targets that students are set have also been streamlined, so that there are fewer of them. Consequently, students are more aware of what level they are working at or towards. This is often referred to in lessons.

Teaching is also improving. The headteacher has encouraged the sharing of best practice, through training the best teachers to be able to coach others, by visits to other schools and through staff development focused on particular themes. She has created a culture of high expectations. The role of the teaching assistants has been developed effectively so that they now actively assist in lessons, in promoting learning as well as helping to control behaviour. An increased emphasis on practical subjects and skills is helping students to enjoy their lessons more. They can see the relevance to their lives, for example in being able to cook. Students and teachers use ICT much more frequently and effectively in lessons. This makes lessons lively and enjoyable and is helping to promote positive attitudes to learning.

The school has devised a good electronic system for recording incidence of poor behaviour. This is regularly analysed to see if there are any patterns, and the information presented to the school's governors, so that they are fully aware of what type of incidents occur and how the school is responding. The analyses show that the staff are doing well because they are proactive in how they manage behaviour, heading off trouble. As a result, there are very few serious incidents. The fact that lessons are proving more enjoyable plays a large part, too, in students' more cooperative behaviour. Students appreciate the rewards system and the chance to take part in the extended day programme, often involving sporting activities.

The annex for students with moderate learning difficulties and for the youngest pupils has been a successful move. Though it is costly for the school to allocate extra staff to this unit, it provides a welcoming and nurturing environment where these students can learn, free from disruptive behaviour that can be a feature in the

main school. A local university has supported the annex by providing ICT equipment and furniture so that students will have their own ICT facility, to enhance learning. This is almost up and running.

The staffing structure has been improved so that it better meets the school's needs. The additional assistant headteacher post has added significantly to the school's capacity to move forward, for example in developing the curriculum and in managing the data about students' progress. The role of home-school liaison has been upgraded to a senior level. This work has expanded and, in close cooperation with other agencies and professionals, is better meeting the needs of some of the school's most vulnerable students and their families. These students have a personalised curriculum, mainly off-site, aimed ultimately at them being able to learn alongside their peers in the future. The school can already demonstrate the success of this approach. Further decisions have been taken to strengthen the part middle managers can play in improvement: new internal appointments are imminent and training is planned.

The admissions policy is no clearer than at the time of the previous inspection. The school's students have a very wide range of needs, but the headteacher and staff nevertheless manage this difficult situation well: in providing a suitable base for the students with moderate learning needs separate from the main school, and in strengthening its home-school liaison work, the school has made sound decisions. As a result, it does its best to meet the needs of all its students. The local authority's school improvement service has worked effectively to support the school.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Honoree Gordon
Her Majesty's Inspector