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Ms Denise Morton  
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Dear Ms Morton

### Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Bill Robson and I inspected your school on 2 March 2010, for the time you and your deputy headteacher gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Discussions with pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and members of the senior leadership team were also very helpful in evaluating the progress the school has made. Please pass on our thanks.

As a result of the inspection on 26 to 27 March 2008, the school was asked to:

- monitor the planned improvements to the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning more effectively so that all pupils achieve as well as they are able
- ensure that all leaders and managers bring a sharper focus to evaluating the effectiveness of the school.

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

These improvements need to be set in the context of the changes since the last inspection. Following the retirement of the headteacher in August 2009, the deputy headteacher was appointed for a term as acting headteacher. Since January 2010, a new permanent headteacher has been in post. Shortly after the 2008 inspection, just under half the teachers left the school to seek work elsewhere. It has taken some time to recruit all the necessary new staff, and there are still 3 vacancies for a full-time teachers. In 2008, the school was re-designated as a specialist school for cognition and learning.



The pupils' moderate or complex learning needs mean that their attainment is exceptionally low when compared to national averages. However, the school's current data, as well as evidence from classroom observations, show that pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning. The quality of learning is variable across the school because of inconsistencies in teaching. The school's data shows that achievement is strongest in Key Stages 1 and 4. The governors and senior leadership team have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and ensure that there is a strong and pervasive focus on bringing about improvement. The new headteacher has brought fresh energy, confidence and commitment to raising achievement. The school collects a good range of data about pupil performance, and data analysis is convincing and useful. The data are regularly shared with all staff who discuss and devise appropriate interventions within departmental meetings. Where underperformance is identified, the school puts in place relevant professional development and organisational strategies, for example to improve the effectiveness of teaching assistants in helping to raise pupils' writing standards.

There is extensive monitoring of teaching and learning particularly through lesson observations and regular scrutiny of work. Paired observations with inspectors demonstrated that senior staff have an accurate view of the quality of teaching. This is satisfactory overall. Leaders rightly recognise that some teachers are struggling to provide activities that accurately match the different capabilities and needs within the class and that encourage independence in learning. Senior staff have ensured, through assiduous monitoring, that marking of pupils' work is now of consistently good quality. Teachers include precise written guidance to pupils on what they have to do to improve their work. Despite this, pupils do not always have a clear understanding of their next steps in learning, because teachers do not refer to individual targets sufficiently frequently in lessons or discussions.

The school has secured satisfactory improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection. Pupils now have opportunities to achieve accreditation in a much wider range of subjects including GCSE, ASDAN, entry level and unit awards. Higher attaining pupils can now be fast-tracked for GCSE preparatory work in Year 9. There are good opportunities for pupils who show artistic promise to join art GCSE lessons in a local secondary school. On the other hand, the school has not yet carried out its planned improvements to the science curriculum, although this was identified as a weak area at the last inspection. Accommodation for the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved but there are still shortcomings, particularly over access to outdoor play, that hold children's achievement back.

The school's specialist school plan is a key driver for development. It has used its enhanced status well to benefit pupils, especially in bringing about improvements in teaching and learning (particularly in the teaching of music and information and communication technology), data collection, the thematic approach to the curriculum and in forging strong academic partnerships with neighbouring schools.



The local authority has provided the school with good support through a difficult period of changing leadership and staff. The school improvement partner provides useful insight, albeit from a secondary mainstream perspective.

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

Mick Megee  
Additional Inspector