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Mr Keith Bruzas
Headteacher
The Horncastle St Lawrence School
Bowl Alley Lane
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Dear Mr Bruzas

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 March 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please also pass my appreciation onto the school's staff, Vice Chair of governors and local authority representatives for taking the time to meet me at such short notice.

As a result of the inspection on 14–15 October 2009, the school was asked to improve its safeguarding arrangements. Two other areas for improvement, judged satisfactory at the time of the inspection, were also identified:

- improving further the rate of pupils' progress by rigorous evaluation of the school's data and the setting of challenging targets
- strengthening the leadership and management of the school by increasing lesson observations to improve further the quality of teaching, setting out actions in detail in the school's development plan and developing the role of governors in challenging the school's performance.

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

The school has rigorously addressed the shortcomings in its single central record of staff vetting and recruitment checks. It has had to deal with some complex issues, especially where information has been missing. The bursar has been tenacious in following up such shortfalls and in working with the local authority to resolve such matters. Recruitment procedures are now thorough and those appointed since the last inspection have undergone application, interview and reference checks which comply fully with the government guidance on safe recruitment. Subject to other checks being clear, the school sometimes allows staff to start work while a Criminal Records Bureau check is being completed, which is acceptable for those who are not



boarding personnel. Procedures are in place to ensure staff are not left alone with children in these circumstances and a risk assessment is always in place. The school has appropriate systems in place to ensure the safety of its staff and pupils overall. Risk assessments for activities are in place, although there are a few shortfalls in relation to aspects of the school site.

Much work has gone into improving assessment, the tracking of pupils' progress and target setting. The school has used national data relating to the progress of pupils with special educational needs and its own information to add a suitable degree of challenge in the targets set. Good information is provided about pupils' progress over time and the data shows this to be satisfactory overall. Through senior staff's analysis of pupils' progress at an individual level, issues have been revealed about the accuracy of assessment. Measures have been put in place to address this and staff are now better informed about the levels pupils are working at. This is through close scrutiny of assessment criteria and the moderation of assessments with staff in their own and other schools. However, full account of this information is not always used in lessons to ensure that pupils are supported to reach the next step or level.

The members of the senior leadership team are a cohesive group who have a clear vision about where the school needs to improve. Their current actions show a strong determination to improve that quality of learning in lessons, in order to raise standards further. This has been the focus during their recent observations, where teaching and learning was judged to be satisfactory overall. Their evaluations also revealed that some staff are not focused enough on the impact of their teaching: as a result, the senior leadership team is working hard to change the culture of the school and staff's practise in this respect. Lessons plans always identify learning outcomes, although these are not always precise enough. Work is not always accurately matched to the different needs and abilities of pupils in each class, and success criteria are not always tightly defined or stated on each plan.

The headteacher and governors, working with staff, have identified largely the right priorities in order to move the school forward. However, except for those relating to teaching and learning, actions in the development plan are still not precisely defined. The success criteria identified are more about things in place or their approval than specific statements to measure the success of actions. Staff absence has been tackled and governors have met with the few staff who have concerns about the pace of improvement. The last inspection report commented on the hesitation by some in responding to the increased pace and this is still the case. This is an aspect which is not directly addressed in the plan.

Governors are now much more aware of their responsibilities and training has been provided to ensure they are clear about what is expected of them. They are beginning to monitor the school's performance by observing aspects of the school's work and receiving information from key staff about provision and progress.

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory. Suitable support, in helping the school to complete its single central record and to ensure safe recruitment, has been provided. However, as the reason for the notice to improve was for safeguarding the local authority decided not to monitor formally the school's improvement. It has now agreed to do this and to work with governors in evaluating the school's impact of its actions.

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

George Derby
Additional Inspector