

Dawn House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122956
Local Authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	359332
Inspection dates	6–7 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Jo Curd

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	81
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Perez
Headteacher	Angela Child
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2008
School address	Helmsley Road Rainworth, Mansfield NG21 0DQ
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Age group	5–19
Inspection dates	6–7 April 2011
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Boarding provision	Dawn House Residential School
Social care Unique Reference Number	SC008761
Social care inspector	Dawn Taylor

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors and a social care inspector. The team observed 17 lessons and saw nine teachers. Discussions were held with groups of pupils, governors and staff. Pupils were observed at breakfast, lunch, tea and evening social events. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at lesson and curriculum planning, lesson monitoring, external reviews, pupils' work, assessments of pupils' progress, individual care plans and 41 questionnaires from parents and carers, 33 from staff, 28 from a range of pupils and 18 from boarders.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively the school is acting to maintain improvements in attendance, especially of those pupils who are absent more frequently.
- To what extent the quality of teaching varies between key stages, classes and subjects and how well leaders are acting to improve it, particularly where the quality remains satisfactory.
- Given that the curriculum post 16 appears highly personalised, to what extent it is adapted to meet individual needs prior to this.
- How well leaders have acted to maintain and develop strengths in boarding provision.

Information about the school

This school is smaller than most of its type. It is one of two run by the national charity 'I CAN'. All of the pupils have statements of special educational needs primarily for difficulties with speech, language and communication and/or Aspergers' syndrome. Most have associated or subsequent difficulties with social skills, self-esteem and emotions such as high levels of anxiety. About 20 per cent are diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome or Autism. Most travel to and from the school each day from a range of counties. Over a third come from much further away and board at the school during the week. Some sixth form students board at the school in the week and on occasional weekends to broaden their experiences and help with independent living skills. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very few pupils have dual registration at this school and another mainstream school. There is a high level of pupil mobility as pupils join any time up to sixth form. Over recent years the youngest pupils have been in Year 4 and all the students at Key Stage 4 have stayed on to the sixth form. The school gained specialist status for communication and interaction and has gold Healthy Schools status. The current Principal joined the school in November 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school where all groups of pupils make good progress in their learning and very good progress in their personal and social development. Excellent care and support help all pupils to settle quickly and make huge gains in independence, confidence and self-esteem. Nearly all pupils are highly appreciative of how the school has welcomed them and helped them to develop and cope with the challenges they face. One parent expressed the views of most when she said, 'Dawn House and its staff have provided a nurturing and supportive environment which has given my child back his enthusiasm to learn, self-belief that he can achieve and the confidence to speak and communicate with others which he previously lacked'. A boarder reflected the views of the vast majority of pupils saying, 'It is excellent because it has given me the chance to become more independent and it has taught me a great deal of self-discipline'.

Teamwork and partnerships are central to the school. Engagement with parents and carers is outstanding. They, along with a diverse range of staff within and beyond the school, work exceedingly well together to meet the needs of each pupil at the school. This is particularly evident in pupils' attendance. Although pupils with histories of low attendance at previous schools are often initially reluctant to attend, excellent partnerships and care successfully help nearly all to change these patterns swiftly, start to enjoy school and attend well. Systems and procedures for safeguarding pupils' health and safety are outstandingly thorough, proactive and robust, ensuring that day and boarding pupils are helped to keep themselves safe in and out of school. All staff are very well trained in these procedures. This extremely strong focus contributes very well to pupils' outstanding feeling of safety and excellent attitudes towards health.

Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use their accurate self-evaluation well to build on strengths and address any areas of weakness, for example linking with a local comprehensive school to form a joint 'girls' group' so that female pupils have opportunities to meet with more girls and maintaining and developing excellent provision and outcomes in the boarding houses. They have used their accurate understanding of teaching across the school well to drive improvements, for example, through focusing professional development and training on areas of need. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory, many were good and a few outstanding. However, lesson monitoring is not always sufficiently rigorous or systematic to pick up whether all improvements are consistent or continuously sustained. For example, there remain variations in how well work is matched to pupils' individual needs and how well lessons motivate and engage them through practical activities.

Students in the sixth form, particularly those who go out to local further education colleges, have a wide choice of subjects and accredited courses. The curriculum for pupils younger than this is broad, balanced and well-enriched. However, it is not always as

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relevant or sufficiently well adapted to provide sufficiently broad opportunities for recognised accreditation for all pupils. This is an area of development for the school.

The school has a very good track record of development and improvement. 'The senior leadership team representing a very broad range of staff and responsibilities, is well motivated and galvanised to take the school forward. New members have already successfully brought developments to their own spheres of work. The school's capacity to sustain further improvement is good'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Over the next year expand the curriculum so that it is relevant to all pupils' needs and provides opportunities for a breadth of accreditation for all pupils.
- Over the next two terms improve the quality of teaching so that the vast majority of lessons are at least good by:
 - ensuring that activities are effectively adapted, active and challenging for all pupils
 - making lesson observations more rigorous and systematic to ensure improvements are consistently implemented and sustained across the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

All groups of pupils enjoy school and achieve well from their individual starting points. There is no significant difference in the outcomes for any groups of pupils because they are all supported so very well and the school uses its specialism of communication and interaction effectively. Pupils use a wide range of signs, symbols and electronic aids to communicate and all develop this well. Other pupils, for example those with autistic spectrum disorders, are not taught in rooms which challenge their sensory impairment such as the science laboratory with its particular sounds and smells. Most pupils have had turbulent schooling prior to admission at Dawn House. Currently examinations and accreditations offered prior to sixth form do not fully show how much progress pupils make. This becomes more evident through vocational courses in Years 12, 13 and 14.

Pupils make good progress in lessons, especially where work is well adapted to their varying needs and tasks are practical and active. In an excellent science lesson, all the pupils were highly engaged in identifying and counting various plants around the school grounds. Resources and tasks were very well adapted to their different needs, for example, some pupils had visual prompts to help them remember what to do and tables of numbers to help them record what they had counted, whilst others were challenged to identify, count and record more plants. All the pupils developed literacy, mathematical, scientific and social skills exceedingly well and enjoyed their time working together in the healthy outdoor air. In contrast progress was slower in a personal, social and health lesson because the task was based on discussion and was not sufficiently varied or practical to fully engage all the pupils.

The vast majority of pupils are confident, friendly, proud of their school and highly appreciative of the very positive relationships they have with all staff. A parent of a relatively new pupil said, 'After four turbulent years at three different schools our son is finally happy and is becoming more confident and self-expressive than ever before'. Pupils

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benefit hugely from the school's strong emphasis on helping them to stay safe and healthy. They develop very secure and positive attitudes towards both of these, including strategies to cope with challenging situations and physical, mental and emotional health. Behaviour is good. The vast majority of pupils learn to face challenging situations calmly and effectively, even though a few still find this difficult. There are some extremely positive aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However because lessons and the curriculum are not always as inspiring and relevant as they could be and pupils are not always fully engaged and motivated in their learning.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Excellent levels of care and support contribute particularly well to good levels of attendance, pupils' positive attitudes and good progress. Teamwork between the very well qualified, experienced, proactive staff is excellent. Consequently pupils' very particular needs, including those pupils who are registered at two different schools, are successfully met and their well-being and personal development are very high. One pupil said, 'I have been really happy 99.9% of the time; when I was in my last school I was really unhappy 99.9% of the time'.

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Strengths of teaching include clear planning showing specific aims to promote language and learning, effective teamwork between speech therapists, teachers and learning support assistants, all of whom are present in the vast majority of lessons, and some interesting, practical activities such as the use of drama, cooking and creating collages for perspective in art. In the most effective lessons work is varied to meet pupils' individual needs and sufficiently practical to ensure they all remain engaged. Progress slows in lessons where this is not the case. Work in some lessons is not sufficiently practical, however, and not always sufficiently varied to meet pupils' individual needs.

The curriculum fully meets statutory requirements. It is very well enriched through a wide range of popular clubs, visits and visitors such as African musicians and local artists. Pupils and staff use information and communication technology well, especially the interactive white boards, to support learning across the curriculum. A strong emphasis on speech, language and communication and personal, social and health education helps all pupils prepare for the future, even though attainment remains low. At Key Stage 4, there are insufficient opportunities for accreditation and these do not always show the full extent of pupils' capabilities or progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers have successfully driven changes and improvements to the school and maintained and developed outstanding provision for boarders. The governing body supports and challenges the school well, even though not all posts are currently filled. Staff morale is good and ambition for pupils is high. Pupils' safety, well-being and confidence are central to all the school does. Policies and procedures for safeguarding, including up-to-date risk assessments and individual care plans are particularly robust and secure. For example, excellent team work between different groups of staff ensures that all elements of pupils' health and safety are frequently updated and central to individual care plans. Within this highly positive environment, pupils flourish and make good progress. Because of regular self-evaluation, senior leaders are well aware of what needs to be done to improve the curriculum and teaching further, even though they are at relatively early stages in implementing some aspects of these changes. However, lesson observations do not always reveal how successfully improvements are being implemented and sustained.

The vast majority of parents and carers are highly positive about the school and involved in extremely effective partnerships promoting their children's learning and development. All the pupils are highly valued and the school promotes equal opportunities well, even

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though adaptations to the curriculum and opportunities for accreditations mean that some students do not always make quite as good progress as they might. The school contributes well to community cohesion, particularly by raising awareness of specific language difficulties locally and nationally and involving pupils in breaking down barriers and discrimination. For example, pupils have spoken to the House of Lords and been involved in local and national campaigns. Their understanding of different cultures to their own is at an earlier stage of development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Outcomes in the sixth form are good because students are supported extremely well, teaching is good and the curriculum is well-tailored to most pupils' needs and interests. The relatively new leader is guided and supported well by other senior staff in the school. The number of students in these classes has risen dramatically over recent years. Over the past two years all those in the school at Year 11 have stayed on to the sixth form and several new students have come from elsewhere. This is largely because the curriculum has expanded and now caters for a wide range of needs and interests. Students follow one of three main pathways or a mixture of these. One supports students on courses at local further education colleges, one offers work-based training and the third offers vocational courses on the school site. Leaders are currently investigating ways to expand the choice of accreditations offered on site because whilst students at further education college have a choice of ten different courses, only horticulture and media are currently delivered at the school. The school is ambitious for all students and one is currently studying A level mathematics. Students made outstanding progress in a drama lesson during the inspection. Despite significant language and communication difficulties they improvised scenes, discussed their own and others' work and evaluated what was good and what would make it better. Work was not so well adapted or practical in an English

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lesson however, and some students found it difficult to remain engaged and focused. Students, particularly those who board, are encouraged to join activities in the local community and often go out to join clubs and events elsewhere. They are particularly appreciative of the care and support they are given. As one of the oldest students said 'The staff are very accommodating of my needs, they are there if I ever have any queries or concerns. They always have time'.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Boarding provision

Residential childcare officers work closely and effectively with teachers, therapists, support staff, parents, carers and external agencies. This ensures the individual needs of young people are given high priority and that they all make outstanding progress in their personal and social development. Their individual needs are clearly identified in detailed care plans, which are regularly reviewed by a diverse team of care staff. These, along with other documents, specifically state how the school meets the individual needs and interests of each individual boarder. Systems of obtaining and listening to boarders' views are fully integrated into the running of the school. These are imaginative and effective in capturing boarders' honest opinions. They include regular house meetings, a school student council and two elected students' representatives on the school's governing body. Additionally an annual pupil participation conference involving parents and students from other local schools provides further opportunities for sharing and expressing views ♦

Partnership with parents is outstanding. The work undertaken by all staff is enhanced by the school's family liaison team and results in excellent relationships with parents who are geographically dispersed. All parents of boarders receive regular reports on the educational progress of their child and their social and emotional development within the boarding community. Parents and carers are also actively involved in transition planning, discussions with Connexions and key school events. Safeguarding pupils' health and safety is a high a priority of all staff and a key strength. Staff understand language impairment very well and are sensitive to issues that may arise. They are highly successful and experienced in balancing risk whilst promoting independence and supporting young people to learn skills to safeguard themselves. ♦ Boarders' health care needs continue to be addressed by the school's network of specialist staff, including a nursing auxiliary, speech and language therapists, occupational therapist and a student mentor. Their work, and the services on offer, continues to improve through external auditing and annual review. This year additional support from the student mentor has been introduced to promote further the emotional well-being of boarders. Leading a healthy life style is promoted through effective healthcare and regular exercise and healthy eating. A group of boarders were

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seen enthusiastically going out to play rounders together after a busy day at school. The Duke of Edinburgh Award has been introduced this year by the residential staff team and seven young people have achieved or are on their way to achieving the bronze level. The catering team maintains a five star excellent standards rating from Mansfield District Council for 'Scores on the doors' and Healthy Schools status. Although boarders generally enjoy their meals greatly, they have requested some changes to food at tea times. Catering staff work well with pupils and are already responding positively to this request. Boarding accommodation is of a good standard. The houses are welcoming and provide a homely atmosphere where young people can relax. They continue to be developed and upgraded through a rolling refurbishment plan. Recent work has meant that all boarders now have a single bedroom. Boarders identify relationships with staff, activities, community involvement and the promotion of independence skills as key strengths of boarding. They stated 'the staff are great'; 'you can have a laugh with them, but if there is a serious matter that needs sorting they will, and straight away'; 'We do a lot outside school. You might not when you first arrive, but staff will help you learn the bus routes and help you find activities you might like to do and then you have a new social life outside school'; 'Dawn House School is brilliant at helping you think about what you want to achieve in the future'; 'staff always want you to do your best'. ♦ The management and organisation of the school's welfare and boarding provision is outstanding. Internal and external quality assurance processes are thorough and proactive. These ensure that senior leaders and managers have a detailed and up to date understanding of the strengths and development needs of the service. Robust policies and procedures are securely in place and regularly reviewed. These underpin a well-established induction and training programme which help ensure that staff are a professional, dedicated team who provide an environment where all communication is accepted, valued and developed. Communication includes signing, use of symbols, supportive writing software, gestures and electronic voice output communication aids. Their practice results in outstanding outcomes for boarders under the Every Child Matters headings of being healthy, staying safe, positive contribution and enjoying and achieving.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- All the required national minimum standards are met.

These are the grades for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision	1
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Views of parents and carers

A higher proportion of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire than in most similar schools. Inspectors found that the engagement of most parents and carers is particularly high. The vast majority of responses were positive about all aspects investigated and higher than in most other schools. Responses to being kept well informed of pupils' progress, the school helping pupils' health, pupils' enjoyment of school and the quality of leadership and management were unanimously positive. Although the vast majority of written comments were appreciative of leaders and managers a very few

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expressed some dissatisfaction with some recent changes. Inspectors found leadership and management good even though they identified that some aspects of the school, notably teaching and the curriculum, have areas for development.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dawn House School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 42 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 81 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	57	18	43	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	71	11	26	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	26	62	16	38	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	62	13	31	2	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	57	16	38	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	50	19	45	2	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	67	12	29	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	33	79	6	14	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	79	4	10	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	57	15	36	2	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	60	16	38	0	0	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	24	57	17	40	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	69	12	29	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



8 April 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dawn House School, Mansfield, NG21 0DQ

We were pleased to meet so many of you when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you, listening to your views and experiences, having meals with you and being with you in lessons and at break times and having some time with boarders in the morning and evening. All the things you told us really helped us with our work - thank you.

We agree with you that Dawn House is a good school where you are all supported and cared for extremely well. You are making very good progress in your personal and social skills and good progress in your learning. We were pleased to hear that most of you feel very safe because you know that staff are there to help you and what to do if you feel anxious or frustrated. You work hard in most lessons and are keen to do your best. However, in some lessons work is not sufficiently well matched to your individual needs and some of you occasionally get a bit frustrated or restless. Although school leaders come in to see how good lessons are and help these improve, their observations do not always ensure that developments continue or happen throughout the school. There is a lot of choice in the sixth form, especially for those of you who go out to college. This is not so much the case for sixth formers who study at school and in earlier years.

We have therefore asked your leaders to make better use of lesson observations to check teaching is improving and to make sure that activities are always suitably challenging for you all. We have also asked them to provide a greater range of courses leading to more varied qualifications to help you all in later life and learning.

All of you can help by continuing to work hard and telling staff when you find something particularly helpful in your learning or if work is too easy or difficult.

With very best wishes to you and your families,

Yours sincerely

Jo Curd

Lead inspector

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