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4 February 2011

Mrs Sue Child
Oakwood School
Balcombe Road
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Surrey
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Dear Mrs Child

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Oakwood School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 3 February 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Could you also convey my thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner and the students I spoke to during the inspection.

There have been a significant number of teaching staff changes since the last inspection. Three new heads of faculty appointments have been made in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 11–12 May 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making:

good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

In 2010, students' levels of attainment improved. The proportion of students who achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics showed good improvement on the previous year. The percentage of students who achieved a good GCSE in science is now significantly above the national average. In that year, students' attainment and the progress they made in English showed good improvement although this was not the case for mathematics. Boys and students who require intensive school support made less progress in their learning than their peers. The school's data for 2011 indicate that students' attainment is set to improve

and boys are gaining ground; they are predicted to achieve better this year. Students' learn well when they are challenged and motivated. Good learning opportunities are being implemented that are addressing the differing needs of learners in lessons. Students actively engage in their learning and welcome the opportunities to make good contributions to their lessons and learn well. Paired work and group work gave students good opportunities to discuss their learning.

Students' behaviour is good in lessons and around the school; they are respectful of each other. They are appreciative of the new student facilities and the input they had in designing the new school uniform. They enjoy the opportunities to contribute to the school community although they feel that there is more scope for them to make an increased contribution in lessons. Attendance is average although improving.

Teachers want to do their best and this was clearly evident in the lessons seen. Good pace, good use of questioning and the effective use of active learning characterised the good lessons. Teachers divided their lessons into sections or 'chunks' well to provide the best opportunities for students to learn effectively and to achieve more challenging levels of learning. Teachers have a good understanding of how well students are performing compared to their targets set. However, not all teachers are revising students' attainment targets when students have achieved or surpassed them. Marking is being undertaken regularly and all teachers are noting 'what went well' and providing students with next steps using the 'even better if' phrase as a common approach to providing feedback. In some lessons the comments made by teachers enabled students to have a firm understanding of what they needed to do to improve their performance. Not all marking is of the highest quality.

The school continues to ensure that all students are entered for a technology subject which may include construction, engineering and motor vehicles. The curriculum of the specialist subject in both key stages is currently being revised; it is intended that the new curriculum will provide appropriate opportunities which will result from modernising students' projects so that they can find more use for their project as well as increasing their sense of achievement. The school reports an improvement in attainment in 2011 across most technology subjects.

The headteacher and her senior team are rapidly implementing effective systems to address the weaker areas identified at the last inspection. There are clear responsibilities and lines of accountability throughout the senior leadership team with good and effective levels of scrutiny and support being provided to new middle leaders. The headteacher is leading from the front and is communicating the vision of 'high expectations' throughout the school extremely well. Action plans identify key priorities and there is effective monitoring that enables leaders to know precisely how well they are doing and what further actions need to be implemented to build on the school's performance. Data are being used well, although leaders recognise that not all teachers are stretching students further than their minimum targets. The

quality of lessons is improving. Weaknesses in teaching and teachers' assessment are being tackled systematically and effectively. A good support programme is driving up the performance of teachers whose lessons are less than satisfactory. A coaching programme has been implemented to increase the quality of other lessons. Students are being given opportunities to assess the quality of their lessons and feedback is used by subject leaders to identify areas for improvement. Learning walks around the school by subject and senior leaders are providing them with up-to-date information on the quality of lessons.

The school has sought many effective ways to communicate with parents and carers which are having good impact on how parents and carers influence the direction of or contribute to the school's strategic objectives. A regular review of parents' and carers' views and a 'You said and we did' analysis are undertaken which have, for example, resulted in the school reviewing the way in which it reports to parents and carers, as well as the development of a virtual learning environment where parents and carers can access homework set for their children. Strategies to engage parents and carers who are hard to reach have successfully resulted in the school opening a 'drop-in' centre in the local youth centre as well as Friday 'Open Door' sessions at the school. The governing body is supporting the work of the school well and undertaking effective monitoring of the school work.

Much good support has been given to the school by the local authority, particularly in the areas of improving the overall quality of teaching and teachers' assessment. The local authority's statement of action fulfils its requirements. The School Improvement Partner is rigorous in her challenge to the performance of school leaders and is making a good contribution to leaders' efforts to improve student outcomes. Many good partnerships have been actively sought by the leadership team which are resulting in increased benefits to the school, especially in the quality of teaching and assessment. The associate headteacher who has been seconded from a high performing school is supporting the work of senior leaders well.

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

Yours sincerely

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010

- Improve teaching in order to accelerate progress, especially in English, mathematics and science, by ensuring it:
 - provides the right level of challenge and support targeted to students' abilities
 - consistently promotes active and independent learning
 - uses a variety of approaches to engage students through different learning styles
 - maintains a pace that keeps students alert and drives progress.
- Strengthen and embed the use of assessment to enhance learning by:
 - providing students with key points to use when evaluating each other's work and keeping a check on the quality of evaluations
 - using questions in lessons to draw out students' understanding and fine tune the lesson's direction
 - ensuring marking consistently gives clear guidance on how to improve.
- Enhance the quality and impact of leadership, particularly subject leadership, by further developing roles and responsibilities at all levels.
- Improve liaison with students' parents and carers and help them contribute effectively to their children's learning and raise their children's expectations of what they can achieve.