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8 July 2011

Mr J Whelan  
Fearnhill School  
Icknield Way West  
Letchworth  
Hertfordshire  
SG6 4BA

Dear Mr Whelan

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Fearnhill School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 July 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory progress

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2011**

- Raise the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE subjects at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, by February 2012 and ensure that all students accelerate their achievement in Key Stages 4 and 5 through a clear strategy that results in:
  - improving the quality of lesson planning, especially in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology, ensuring that learning objectives and activities are better matched to students' needs
  - a greater focus on academic guidance, assessment techniques and checks on students' understanding and learning through effective questioning and detailed feedback
  - a greater drive on the quality and volume of work produced by students in class and out of lessons
  - an appropriate pace of learning, greater challenge, and where necessary effective learning support for individual students
  - a curriculum that meets students' needs more fully at all levels, ensuring that they achieve their potential in school and in off-site provision.
  
- Develop the capacity of leaders, managers and the governing body to improve the school by:
  - strengthening the consistency and robustness of monitoring of the quality of teaching, of assessment, and scrutiny of students' work by all leaders and managers
  - raising staff expectations of what students can achieve and ensuring a greater focus on students' learning and progress in lessons in line with their needs
  - developing self-critical evaluation processes at all levels of the school that enable staff to take greater accountability for students' outcomes.
  
- Accelerate achievement and raise aspirations in the sixth form through greater rigour in monitoring, evaluating and planning of the provision.

## **Special measures: monitoring of Fearnhill School**

### **Report from the first monitoring inspection on 6 July 2011**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, groups of students, two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.

#### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, a seconded deputy headteacher from the local authority has joined the senior leadership team and senior roles have been reorganised.

#### **Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning**

At the last inspection, attainment was below the national average and students made inadequate progress. In particular, White British students, less-able students, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities underachieved. Indian students achieved well.

Evidence from this visit indicates that students are beginning to make quicker progress in some lessons. In the majority of lessons observed, progress and the quality of learning were satisfactory with an increasing number where they were good. Learning is strongest in lessons where there is an element of independence for students, and opportunities for collaborative learning, alongside good advice and feedback on how to improve work. Students respond enthusiastically when learning opportunities take account of prior learning. In satisfactory lessons, learning tasks did not always meet the needs of each student sufficiently well. Students say they are much clearer about what they are expected to learn in some lessons.

The school has detailed information about the attainment of each student leading to the implementation of some intervention strategies. However, the impact of intervention strategies has been variable and they have yet to be fully evaluated. Attendance for extra sessions during holidays was low for English and mathematics. For business studies, it was higher and externally verified work suggests students will achieve 98% A\* to C grades for GCSE equivalent courses. The school's tracking data suggests positive improvements in the percentage of students likely to achieve five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics. Internal tracking data also identifies underachievement as an issue in other year groups. For example, in Year 7 English, there are more students below their targets than on or above.

In the sixth form, the school's internal tracking data and module examination results In March 2011 suggest more students are on track to achieve their targets.

## Other relevant pupil outcomes

During the inspection, the students' behaviour and attitude to learning were generally positive. Movement around the school was calm. Students' enjoyment in lessons depends on the subject, and they raised concerns about the lack of and frequency of homework and lateness to lessons not being consistently tackled by staff. Sixth form students receive good levels of guidance with careers and higher education. They have good involvement in whole-school activities.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Raise the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE subjects at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, by February 2012 and ensure that all students accelerate their achievement in Key Stages 4 and 5 through a clear strategy that results in:
  - improving the quality of lesson planning, especially in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology, ensuring that learning objectives and activities are better matched to students' needs
  - a greater focus on academic guidance, assessment techniques and checks on students' understanding and learning through effective questioning and detailed feedback
  - a greater drive on the quality and volume of work produced by students in class and out of lessons
  - an appropriate pace of learning, greater challenge, and where necessary effective learning support for individual students
  - a curriculum that meets students' needs more fully at all levels, ensuring that they achieve their potential in school and in off-site provision
  - **satisfactory**

## The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors visited 27 lessons and conducted joint observations with senior staff, whose views agreed with those given by inspectors. A common approach to lesson planning across the school is ensuring lessons are delivered effectively. Good lessons are well-planned and contain a variety of interesting and demanding activities for students to undertake, and high expectations from staff ensure that all abilities can succeed. Lessons meet the needs of students of different abilities, and positive relationships ensure all are engaged in learning. Teachers use explicit objectives about what the students are to learn – in terms of increased knowledge and skills, and improved understanding. There are frequent checks on what students have learned. Where teaching is weaker, there is not enough challenge for the more able and a lack of structure for the less able to develop their understanding. Students are not always engaged in these lessons and often are doing the same task. Too often, there remains a lack of clarity in the learning objectives which are often not

sufficiently focused or precise. In English, mathematics and information and communication technology there remains a small minority of inadequate lessons. When learning is inadequate, tasks are inappropriate to the students' learning needs and too little effort is demanded from students, leading to a small amount of work being completed.

A marking policy has recently been introduced but has yet to be fully established and consistently applied. Marking is improving but remains inconsistent. In humanities, students have a clear overview of the progress they are making. In some books, marking remains superficial with not enough focus on what students need to do to improve or reach the next level or grade. English books showed that a sufficient volume of work is not always completed and students do not have regular access to their assessment folders to have an overview of how they are doing.

Increasingly, there is effective support from learning support assistants in lessons, especially for students who are less able or have particular needs. However, targets set for some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are not sufficiently challenging. There is an appropriate curriculum in place for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in Key Stage 3 through the creative studies course, with a focus on improving weak literacy and numeracy skills. At Key Stage 4, there is the Step Up course. A range of vocational courses are in place so students can follow a curriculum more suited to their needs.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The senior leadership team has been refocused to provide more strategic and fit-for-purpose leadership centred on learning, improving outcomes and ensuring accountability at all levels. A great deal of ground work has been done to clarify roles and responsibilities. Hence, senior leaders are more realistic about the school's progress and its strengths and weaknesses. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by senior leaders are accurate and more robust. Staff observed delivering inadequate lessons are receiving support and coaching and their improvement monitored.

A consistent approach is developing to the monitoring of the quality of teaching, of assessment, and scrutiny of students' work by all leaders and managers. This has made middle leaders more accountable and increasingly aware of the significance of the role they have to play in raising attainment. However, not all middle leaders are working in a self-critical manner when reviewing students' work or putting in intervention strategies in year groups other than Year 11. Evidence from some middle leaders is insufficiently robust. The school has improved its data systems so they are now more readily available to all staff, with signs that this is being used to support lesson planning. Line-management meetings with all leaders now use data as part of the improvement agenda and the achievement of different groups is a key focus. Overall, there has been an improvement in the quality and use of data across

the school; the building blocks are in place. Line-management meetings throughout the school are more rigorous and have a clear common agenda.

Governance has been strengthened with good support from the local authority through a series of appropriate training sessions in how to interpret data. The governing body is continuing to develop and enhance its role of challenge and support. The full governing body has restructured itself and has benefited from advice and guidance from the local authority on its role and responsibilities. It has formulated its own action plan in response to the Ofsted findings. It is more aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

A number of initiatives have been introduced in the sixth form to improve outcomes but their impact is very much at the early stages. Curriculum provision is being enhanced in September 2011 with an extended project qualification to develop students' independent skills. In addition, an apprenticeship in carpentry is being offered. Teaching and learning are improving in the sixth form and are satisfactory. However, private-study time is not always coordinated with students' workload. Regular tracking of students' progress against targets is taking place, so intervention strategies can be put in place for students falling behind. In addition, 'round table' discussions are being held with subject leaders to share successful strategies used to improve students' performance.

The specialist mathematics and computing college status has not had enough impact on raising whole school attainment. There are effective links with local primary school in engaging pupils in exciting activities. Students at Fearnhill have many opportunities to take part in mathematics challenges.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Develop the capacity of leaders, managers and the governing body to improve the school by:
  - strengthening the consistency and robustness of monitoring of the quality of teaching, of assessment, and scrutiny of students' work by all leaders and managers
  - raising staff expectations of what students can achieve and ensuring a greater focus on students' learning and progress in lessons in line with their needs
  - developing self-critical evaluation processes at all levels of the school that enable staff to take greater accountability for students' outcomes
  - **satisfactory.**
  
- Accelerate achievement and raise aspirations in the sixth form through greater rigour in monitoring, evaluating and planning of the provision
  - **satisfactory.**

## **External support**

There has been a wide range of support from external agencies. The local authority has provided good support through its improvement advisers, subject consultants and local partner schools. The school improvement partner has also undertaken joint monitoring visits to classrooms with the headteacher and some middle leaders and has conducted meetings with a variety of middle leaders to consider their role and responsibilities for self-evaluation. A National Leader in Education from an outstanding Hertfordshire school has been supporting the headteacher in developing a more rigorous and robust approach to school leadership through a mentoring and coaching programme. The local authority statement of action meets requirements and clearly sets out the actions the local authority will carry out to support the school.