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Mr Clive Gilbert  
The Headteacher  
Fernhill School  
Neville Duke Road  
Farnborough  
Hampshire  
GU14 9BY

Dear Mr Gilbert

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Fernhill School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 November and for the comprehensive information which you provided prior to, and during the inspection. Please pass on my particular thanks to the governors and students who gave up their time to meet with me.

There is a new chair of the governing body since the previous inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 21 and 22 June 2011, 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 satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Since the previous inspection when the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures was judged to be inadequate, school leaders and the governing body have responded robustly and with urgency to put into place the necessary improvements. Adopting a rigorous and systematic approach, safeguarding arrangements now clearly meet all statutory requirements. Significant actions taken include ensuring that: all aspects of staff, governor and volunteer vetting and associated record-keeping procedures are fully in place; all relevant policies have been updated and amended; recent training requirements have been identified and met for all staff and governors; and, management arrangements involving the headteacher and the school's child protection officers are clearly defined and well understood by all. Moreover, school leaders have added external professional expertise in this field to the governing body and are now also making appropriate use of the self-evaluation

tool provided by the local authority to enable further minor improvements to be identified and addressed.

Sound early steps have been taken to begin to improve the effectiveness of the governing body, also found to be inadequate at the previous inspection. There is increasing evidence of governing body involvement in determining the strategic priorities of the school over and above those identified as key issues in the previous inspection, such as to be more responsive to the views of parents and carers. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance are becoming a more regular feature of governing body meetings, notably in the curriculum committee where there has been extensive scrutiny of the 2011 GCSE results and, in particular, achievement in English. The monitoring of the achievement and outcomes of different groups of students is developing but is not yet securely in place. The governing body and school leaders are aware that strengthening this dimension further will be a pre-requisite for a judgement of at least satisfactory overall effectiveness at the next full inspection. Similarly, whilst aspects of the school improvement plan are now being reviewed more regularly, the governing body's precise role in the monitoring process is not made explicit enough in the plan itself.

The 2011 GCSE results showed that students' achievement was broadly similar to the previous year. The trend of markedly better attainment and progress in mathematics compared with in English remains. There is still also some variability in the achievement in different subjects across the curriculum and in the achievement of different groups. Boys continue to achieve significantly less well than girls and, in 2011, students known to be eligible for free school meals and some with special educational needs and/or disabilities performed less well than their peers nationally. However, the school's tracking data reveal that rates of progress across the school as a whole are beginning to increase, including in English. In Key Stage 3 English classes, there is evidence of accelerating progress as students are beginning to respond positively to the improving curriculum, more settled staffing and better recent leadership in this subject.

The quality of teaching is improving gradually and there is good practice evident in many subjects. However, there is still a lack of consistency across, and in some cases within, subjects, which restricts most students from making good or better progress. There is extensive assessment information available in the school, but teachers are not yet routinely making the best use of it to tailor work to provide sufficient challenge for all students. The school's strategy to raise staff expectations and expertise in marking for improvement has made a conspicuously successful start and this is an area where progress since the previous inspection has been most rapid. Students report that their work in most subjects is regularly marked, targets are given and referred to explicitly and, in some cases, they are given opportunities in class to reflect and act upon teacher feedback immediately. They also affirm that, whilst teaching is improving, the low-level disruptive behaviour of a few students in some subjects restricts the rate of progress for other students in those groups.

Self-evaluation, which was evaluated as being 'over-generous' in the previous inspection report, is becoming more accurate; this is providing a more realistic picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Notwithstanding its clear and useful sets of action points for each objective, the school improvement plan is currently too focused on processes rather than outcomes and does not identify with sufficient clarity the milestones to assist periodic monitoring and evaluation of impact. The school's language specialism is now well established and continues to make a valuable contribution to curriculum breadth and to extending students' cultural horizons.

The statement of action constructed by the local authority is fit for purpose and provides a coherent and realistic framework to assist the school's improvement. The local authority has put in place a significant level of curriculum and leadership support and is being proactive in identifying a range of areas for improvement beyond those stated explicitly in the key issues from the previous inspection to enable sustainable development over time; these include attendance and behaviour management.

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

Ken Bush  
**Additional Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Ensure that all staff are subject to the required checks to work with students and that safeguarding policies and practice are robust and monitored meticulously.
- Improve the effectiveness of governance by ensuring that the governing body:
  - meets all statutory duties with regard to the safeguarding of young people
  - monitors and evaluates the impact of the child protection policy, e-safety and equality of opportunity policies against outcomes for all students has the capacity to ask challenging questions about the performance of student groups through rigorous analysis of assessment data, and sharper monitoring and evaluation of strengths and weaker areas of whole-school performance.
- Increase the proportion of students making good and outstanding progress so that the proportion achieving five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics increases by:
  - raising the proportion of consistently good and outstanding teaching within and across all departments and eradicating inadequate teaching
  - enabling all teachers to use assessment data to plan learning that is suitably matched to the individual needs of students
  - improving the frequency and quality of feedback and marking across the whole school so that students receive step-by-step guidance to know how to improve their work and reach or exceed their targets.