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Mrs Sue Child
Headteacher
Oakwood School
Balcombe Road
Horley
RH6 9AE

Dear Mrs Child

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakwood School

Following my visit with additional inspectors John Worgan and Karen Roche to your school on 29 February to 1 March 2012, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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 since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed with appropriate authorisation and only in subject areas where there is capacity to offer support.

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 Surrey.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Build on recent improvements in teaching so that a consistently higher proportion of teaching is good or better and so raise achievement by:
 - ensuring that teaching consistently supports and challenges all students, particularly for those who have the potential to reach the highest grades in examinations
 - involving all students more actively in their lessons through whole-class, individual and group work to foster independent and cooperative learning
 - giving students greater opportunities to develop, apply and reinforce their learning across subjects
 - checking the understanding and progress of all students in lessons and giving clear written feedback to ensure they all know about how to improve and so move up to the next level in each subject.

- Ensure students feel safe and improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning across the school by:
 - providing and clearly communicating a code of conduct for behaviour
 - training staff so they effectively and consistently apply the behaviour policy
 - developing students' understanding of how to keep safe and their confidence that any concerns will be heard and effectively acted upon
 - involving all students in school decision making – giving students more opportunities to take on roles of responsibility.

- Develop the home–school learning partnership by improving the effectiveness of communication systems and involving parents and carers more in school life.

- Develop senior and middle leaders so they take a more evaluative and strategic approach to their roles in order to maximise their impact on outcomes for students, in particular on achievement, behaviour and staying safe.

Special measures: monitoring of Oakwood School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 29 February – 1 March 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the School Improvement Consultant, senior and middle school leaders and groups of students, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement. Inspectors also conducted discussions with members of the governing body and the School Improvement Advisor from the local authority. The inspection team observed 20 parts of lessons taught by 19 teachers.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed. Additional roles have been created at middle leadership level to strengthen the pastoral support for students. Some systems have been reviewed and amended, for example the annual monitoring, review and evaluation cycle. The school has recently been awarded Surrey County Council's Bronze Charter Mark for outstanding anti-bullying practice. The school's key issue on developing home-school partnerships was not inspected during this visit, as good progress had been made at the time of the previous visit.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The complete remarking of GCSE English higher level papers sat by students in 2011 has brought the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics to just below the national average. The school's current data indicate that levels of attainment are continuing to rise and the school cites data gained from early examination entries, as well as a proven record of accurate predictions, to estimate a sharp rise in the proportion of students set to gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2012. School leaders have rightly focused on those students who have the potential to achieve the highest grades in their examinations. In addition, a programme of intervention sessions and holiday revision courses targeted at students who fail to make expected progress is contributing towards an improvement in outcomes. Progress seen in lessons during the inspections, and from scrutiny of students' books, was not so strong, and was broadly satisfactory. Inspectors noted, however, that leaders' drive to match the work in lessons to students' needs was starting to have an impact on the quality of teaching. In these more effective lessons, students progressed at a more rapid rate.

Students continue to enjoy and achieve particularly well in some of the humanities subjects and in physical education.

The quality of teaching

Inspectors carried out a number of lesson observations with members of the senior leadership team and in these lessons, agreed with their judgements. The proportion of satisfactory teaching observed was equal to that which was good. Some inadequate teaching was observed as was some that was outstanding. In the better lessons observed, teachers presented a greater element of challenge and have raised their own expectations of what students can achieve. These lessons had good pace and presented opportunities for students to play an active part in the learning process. Students were observed being actively engaged in group and pair work, and teachers checked for understanding at various points during the lesson. Inspectors saw more teaching targeted at specific groups of students, usually by ability. Consequently, the needs of higher achieving students are being better addressed. Many teachers have started to offer students a choice of tasks at the start of the lesson, each of which attracts a different attainment level. Other teachers offer a range of tasks but insist students attempt them all, starting with the lowest and progressing to the highest. Some students in Key Stage 3 report that teachers talk too much from the front, which sometimes leads to deterioration in students' attitudes. Some good independent learning was observed in a few lessons including in humanities and design and technology, but few students were observed working independently for extended periods of time.

Some good links between subject areas were identified which reinforce students' learning. The school's documentation showed evidence of productive, collaborative work between religious education and history, and between music and modern foreign languages. A project based on the Olympic Games which was designed to link all departments has also been successful. The promotion of literacy across the curriculum is stronger in some subject areas than others, and this was rightly judged to be satisfactory in an audit conducted by local authority consultants.

In the best lessons, teachers were observed giving high quality verbal feedback. The quality of marking remains variable overall. Scrutiny of students' work demonstrated limited reference as to how students can move up a level, and few teachers had checked that students had responded to their suggestions for improvement.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Build on recent improvements in teaching so that a consistently higher proportion of teaching is good or better and so raise achievement – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour seen during this inspection was variable. In a number of lessons, teaching and learning were affected by persistent low-level disruptive behaviour. This tends to occur more in lessons where teaching is weaker, and planning for learning does not take the needs of all students into account. In the more effective lessons, where the quality of teaching secured better progress, students were more engaged in their learning and consequently did not get distracted by others. Students told inspectors that although they have noted some improvement in behaviour, poor behaviour in some lessons remains an area of concern for them. The school has reviewed the system of sanctions for dealing with students who display unacceptable behaviour in lessons and has reduced the number of teachers' warnings from three to two, before the student is directed to the internal seclusion room. Students reported that this has had an impact and fewer students are removed from the lesson. However, they also reported that the use of the revised warning system is not yet consistent, and that some teachers do not use it at all. Inspectors found this to be the case.

Students reported that although some incidents of bullying do occur, they are a lot more confident that any instances reported to staff will be dealt with effectively. The school's focus on combating bullying, including its anti-bullying week last November, had a positive impact so that incidents of bullying have reduced. Students support each other through a peer mentor system and the good work conducted on tackling bullying has meant that the school is the first in the county to be awarded the Surrey Charter Mark for outstanding anti-bullying practice.

Students also reported that although they feel behaviour around the school is steadily improving, some continue to express concern about unsafe behaviour when students use the corridors and stairs. Some students need considerable direction to move to lessons on time and many were seen using mobile telephones en route. The school's records on behaviour show that the number of fixed-term exclusions and incidents of high-level poor behaviour have been significantly reduced this term. Students' views on issues affecting them are gathered weekly in form time and discussed at the school council meeting. At a meeting of the school council scheduled during the inspection, students were observed discussing how best to use a council grant of £1000 to promote citizenship.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure students feel safe and improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning across the school – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have responded positively to the key issues and to points raised during the first monitoring visit. They have prioritised actions appropriately and

students' academic outcomes are improving. Students also feel safer in school than at the time of the previous inspection. Middle leadership has been strengthened through the introduction of pastoral coordinators who will support the work of the year heads, some of whom will have responsibility for two year groups. Middle leaders speak positively about systems for monitoring which they say are rigorous, and scrutiny of the minutes of meetings demonstrate that action points arise out of these discussions. The school's self-evaluation documentation addresses the key areas for school improvement. However, leaders recognise that a more evaluative analysis will assist them in informing strategic improvement planning. The school has already adopted a more evaluative approach towards measuring progress against the local authority's statement of action. Faculty leaders have recently reviewed the strengths and areas for development within their subject areas, but there remains some inconsistency in the quality of faculty development plans, and self-evaluation processes do not yet match those for measuring the performance of the school as a whole. Line managers are continuing to work effectively with middle leaders to develop their understanding of the extent to which they are accountable for the performance of students in their areas. Teachers who are newly qualified speak positively of the support they receive, and the induction of these members of staff is well managed.

The governing body is becoming more challenging when discussing the school's performance and students' outcomes, and is requesting a wider range of evidence from the school in order to hold leaders and managers to account. Consequently, it demonstrated a stronger awareness of the school strengths and barriers to improvement. Senior leaders plan to further develop this awareness through the provision of data on the performance of different groups of students.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Develop senior and middle leaders so that they take a more evaluative and strategic approach to their roles in order to maximise their impact on outcomes for students, in particular on achievement, behaviour and staying safe – good

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support through the provision of a School Improvement Consultant for two days per week. The local authority School Improvement Advisor visits the school once a month to review progress with regard to the statement of action. Support in improving behaviour and safety of students is provided through consultants on a half-termly basis. The local authority has also conducted a review on the provision of literacy which was judged to be satisfactory overall. Leaders and managers at the school value the support they receive.