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Ms Felicity Martin
Interim Headteacher
The Clere School
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Berkshire
RG20 9HP

Dear Ms Martin

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Clere School

Following my visit with Helen Griffiths, Additional Inspector, to your school on 16 and 17 May 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Chris Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement of all groups of students by:
 - ensuring that there is a shared approach to judging levels of attainment and agree what good and outstanding progress means in relation to students' starting points
 - using assessment data and information about individual needs to plan lessons that interest and challenge students of differing abilities and extend their thinking
 - ensuring all staff are focused on what students are learning in individual lessons and the longer term, in order to meet suitably challenging targets.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and governance by:
 - making senior leaders accountable for evaluating all aspects of the school's work with greater rigour and accuracy
 - ensuring the performance and experience of different groups are tracked and analysed
 - implementing clearly focused plans to rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning and share good and outstanding practice across the school
 - communicating consistently high expectations and an explicit vision for improvement which is clearly understood by staff, parents and carers and students
 - applying the school's behaviour management system consistently and taking effective action to tackle persistent absence.

Special measures: monitoring of The Clere School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 16–17 May 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed parts of 26 lessons taught by 26 teachers. They also conducted a learning walk across 10 lessons that focused on behaviour. Four lesson observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors met with school staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority. They talked to students in lessons and met with groups of students from Year 10 and Year 11. Inspectors reviewed teachers' planning and students' work in lessons. Inspectors also examined a range of school documents, including self-evaluation and information about students' achievement, behaviour and attendance.

Context

The previous headteacher resigned in January. Two interim headteachers were in post until March. Subsequently, a full-time interim headteacher was appointed on a longer term basis. An Interim Executive Board (IEB) was convened in March and this group has held two formal meetings. There have been changes to personnel and roles and responsibilities at senior leadership level.

The quality of teaching

The proportion of teaching that is consistently good or better has risen steadily since the last inspection. Satisfactory teaching usually has several good features. Consequently, students are generally making quicker progress in lessons. Inspection evidence and the school's increasingly reliable information about students' achievement indicate that attainment in Year 11 is improving. These students are making better progress than that of similar students last year. Nevertheless, leaders have accurately identified inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school and within subjects. The proportion of outstanding teaching is currently low and some pockets of inadequate teaching remain.

In lessons, students are usually more engaged because teachers plan activities that make better use of paired and small group collaborative tasks. Students say that they enjoy these more practical lessons, especially when teachers pose challenging questions that require them to think about their learning. For example, these strategies enabled students in a Year 7 history lesson to take charge of their own learning when discussing Henry VIII's break from the Church of Rome. In the best lessons targeted questioning and class discussion extends pupils' understanding. However, some teachers have a narrower repertoire of questioning strategies and/or a limited range of approaches to managing feedback from individuals and groups. As

a result, there are often missed opportunities to consolidate students' learning or deal with misconceptions, particularly at the ends of lessons.

Teachers have better access to information about their students' prior levels of attainment and growing understanding of their students' personal targets. Consequently, there is better understanding of what constitutes good and outstanding progress. Generally, teachers use this information to plan lessons that are more challenging. For example, students made rapid progress in a Year 11 biology revision lesson because activities were sharply focused on their gaps in learning. Typically, teachers share learning objectives with students at the start of lessons. These are often adapted for students of different ability. However, the learning objectives are not always revisited during lessons and the success criteria against which teachers and students evaluate their work are often too vague. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to assess how well students have met their more challenging personal targets. While the pace of learning in lessons is generally improving, the time management of some activities is inconsistent. In some lessons students are unable to complete tasks fully or begin the more challenging work quickly enough.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Eliminating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and raising achievement of all groups of students – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

While progress in this area has been satisfactory, the rate of recent improvement is accelerating discernibly. The dynamic and highly experienced interim headteacher has made a positive impact in a short period of time. Nevertheless, many systems are new or newly revised and it will take time before the full impact of leaders' actions can be seen on raising students' achievement across the school.

The interim headteacher has raised expectations among staff and students. She has refocused teachers on the essential constituents of good and outstanding lessons. A comprehensive school calendar ensures that leaders and teachers have a greater understanding of their role in assessment, monitoring and self-evaluation. The headteacher is supported well by a vibrant and evolving senior team; it is held to account for the areas it leads on. The Interim Executive Board, although newly formed, has hit the ground running; its Chair has an astute understanding of the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of leaders' actions. Together, senior leaders and the Interim Executive Board have an accurate view of the school's priorities and have begun to address these with energy and single-mindedness.

Senior leaders have focused determinedly on those students' that are currently underachieving. The Year 11 'War Room' provides a regular forum to track the performance of different groups. More reliable information about students' progress

enables leaders to act more quickly when additional support is needed. For example, leaders have begun to address the slower progress made by lower and middle ability Year 10 students in mathematics. Leaders were also quick to identify students in Key Stage 4 who had gaps in their timetables. They now receive their proper entitlement alongside additional support in English and mathematics. The quality of middle leadership, although improving, is too variable. Improving line management structures and opportunities to work alongside senior leaders are helping middle leaders to gain confidence in their roles. Nevertheless, some do not yet have sufficient expertise to contribute fully to wider school improvement.

The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching. An audit of staff development needs is under way. Teaching staff have evaluated their own performance against common criteria and, while these evaluations tend to be too positive, they provide a useful starting point for future discussions about teaching and learning. Leaders have drawn up ambitious plans for future professional development opportunities. The early impact of staff training can be seen in teachers' better use of collaborative group work activities in lessons.

Behaviour management systems have been fully revised. Staff and students have a clearer understanding of these. Students say that behaviour has improved. The number of incidents of poor behaviour has fallen, in some areas dramatically. Positive relationships are the norm in lessons. Generally, prompt starts to lessons have resulted from the recently introduced 'ready to learn' routines. Attendance has risen. The proportion of students who are regularly absent has fallen strongly when compared with last year; this represents good progress.

While senior leaders and the Interim Executive Board recognise that parents and carers are concerned about the future of the school, initial meetings have begun to repair their confidence. For example, an additional parents' and carers' evening was organised to ensure that they were given better information about the curriculum and students could reselect those courses that would maximise their potential for success.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement.

- Improving the effectiveness of leadership and management and governance – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has a precise understanding of the school's strengths and the need to focus resolutely on improving wider leadership and teaching. Its statement of action meets requirements and is embedded in the new school improvement plan. Local authority advisers and consultants have already helped the school to improve its systems for tracking students' progress and managing behaviour. Crucially, the

local authority was quick to support the school in recruiting strong senior leaders and experienced members of the Interim Executive Board. Clearly, as leaders are newly in post it will take time before the full impact of their actions can be seen on raising achievement. Close liaison between the headteacher and the local authority means that levels of support are under constant review. The school has worked successfully with external partners to support self-evaluation, particularly when moderating judgements about the quality of teaching.