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28 January 2013

Mr Jonathan Dennett  
Headteacher  
Fitzharrys School  
Northcourt Road  
Abingdon  
Oxfordshire  
OX14 1NP

Dear Mr Dennett

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Fitzharrys School**

Following my visit to your school on Monday 28 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a school improvement officer whose work is funded by the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated.

### **Context**

There have been no significant changes in staffing since the last inspection. The local authority has endorsed a two-year partnership with a local academy, a designated national leader of education, which is underway but in its early stages. This partnership is funded by the National College for School leadership. The headteacher of the academy is meeting fortnightly with the headteacher of Fitzharrys to monitor and evaluate improvements. The school improvement officer

continues to provide direct support to the school, monitoring the quality of teaching and its impact on student achievement and helping to develop the expertise of subject leaders. A local authority advisory teacher, who is a specialist in mathematics, is working part-time in the mathematics department until the end of the academic year, to strengthen teaching.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

Since the inspection, the headteacher has refined existing improvement plans to make sure that they are tightly focused on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection and that there are clear systems in place to monitor progress towards targets. Plans are helpfully cross-referenced to measurable achievement targets and to a log of actions and their impact. There is a determined focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. A range of strategies have been implemented to support teachers in matching work to students' abilities and in setting work which 'stretches, enthuses and absorbs' them. The headteacher's evaluation is that leadership and teaching in mathematics are strengthening; there are early encouraging signs of improving attainment. There is a new and detailed system for keeping check on how well students in Year 12 are doing. Senior leaders are using the system to plan support and intervention for individual students or subject areas.

The governing body is aware of its responsibility to secure rapid improvement by challenging the school robustly and by holding it to account for its progress against targets. Governors have undertaken training to improve their understanding of information on students' progress and are asking searching questions, for example about the quality of marking and homework. They have not yet, however, undertaken a full review of governance, which was a key area for improvement arising from the inspection.

The local authority has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, largely informed by the school improvement officer's monitoring reports. Its statement of action specifies what further support will be provided to the school through school improvement officers and the national leader of education. However, it is not always clear enough in setting criteria or in establishing milestones for success against a tight timescale. For example, the success criteria attached to a review of governance are too vague and there is no deadline for its completion.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**