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5 July 2013

Ms Jill Howson  
Principal  
Furness School  
Rowhill Road  
Hextable  
Kent  
BR8 7RP

Dear Ms Howson

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Furness School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 July, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2012. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers at this stage.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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, the director of Lilac Sky Schools and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Interim Executive Board
- Director of Lilac Sky Schools
- Director of Children's Services, Kent
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:  
[BUD.MAILBOX@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:BUD.MAILBOX@education.gsi.gov.uk)
- The lead inspector.

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2012.**

- Make urgent improvements in the school's safeguarding arrangements to ensure the safety and well-being of students.
- Accelerate students' progress and raise attainment, especially in mathematics and in communication skills.
- Eradicate inadequate teaching and promote high professional standards by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of students' capabilities
  - using assessment information when planning lessons to ensure that work meets pupils' needs and is sufficiently challenging
  - ensuring that lesson content motivates and engages students in their learning
  - ensuring that lessons effectively promote students' personal development.
- Ensure that all adults respond effectively and consistently to any incidents of inappropriate behaviour.
- Ensure that students develop respect for themselves and others and feel safe in school.
- Develop effective strategies to ensure that all students attend school regularly and adopt safe practices in lessons and around the school site.
- Secure effective leadership and management at all levels in order to promote rapid and sustained improvement.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 July**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. She met the Principal, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority. She had discussions with staff and students and held a telephone conversation with the director of Lilac Sky Schools. Eight lessons were jointly observed with a senior member of staff. The inspector also visited the two residential houses and spoke to the head of care, staff and students.

### **Context**

There have been some changes among the teaching staff since the last visit; the senior leadership team has remained the same but with the addition of a new head of care. Following some restructuring of middle leadership, leaders for Key Stages 3 and 4 have been appointed. Discussions have been held within the local authority and the Interim Executive Board (IEB) with regard to the future of the school and possible academy status. No final steps have been taken but it is probable that in future the school will take more students with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition. It is likely that the school will begin the new school year with around 35 students on roll but it will be able to accept mid-year referrals as the year progresses.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Achievement overall is not yet good because there is still too much variation between subjects and between year groups. However, the proportion of students making expected or greater progress has increased, particularly in Years 8 and 11. Students make the most progress in English and the school is rightly planning a strong focus on all aspects of communication, including literacy, in the coming school year. Progress in mathematics is less consistent but where recent steps have been taken to improve teaching for certain year groups, this has had a noticeable impact. Information held by the school indicates that the majority of Year 11 students entered for GCSE are on track to achieve the grades they are aiming for. Although for most these are likely to be grades D to G, younger students are already appropriately working at levels equivalent to a grade C in a few subjects.

The school has detailed information to show the positive impact that different interventions have had upon the progress of students who are supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families). As a result of improved teaching, the proportion of lessons in which students make good progress has increased markedly. Improved teaching has resulted in improved behaviour in many lessons and students

are much more involved in their learning as a result. However, there are a few students who are still not in class enough and this is affecting their progress.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching has improved but it is still too variable. The school has found it difficult to recruit good permanent staff for some subjects and this affects the quality of teaching overall. However, due to some expert coaching, many staff have improved their practice and now plan and deliver lessons that interest and involve the students well. The quality of lesson content has improved overall with very few examples of time being wasted. Teaching assistants have rightly been allocated to subject areas and opportunities are included well for them to model tasks or to observe and record progress during lessons. On a number of occasions during the inspection, teaching assistants were observed leading part of a lesson to great effect. Many are able to demonstrate their own knowledge and learning in a way that particularly engages, and sometimes amuses, the students and so increases students' enjoyment of learning.

Expectations of what they can achieve challenge most students well. Good relationships also help students challenge one another positively and this helps both their learning and their personal development. For example, in a design and technology lesson, one student was able to challenge another's proposed design. A solution was reached with very little teacher intervention and good progress was made. The strongest teachers share with students what they are going to learn and provide many opportunities for them to assess for themselves how well they are doing. In most lessons both staff and students make good use of success criteria to assess the levels at which students are working. Plenary sessions are generally used well for this but some are rushed with teachers inclined to answer their own questions, for example: 'Have you achieved that? Yes, I think you have.'

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

As a result of improved teaching, students' behaviour in class is generally positive. Attitudes to learning have greatly improved and, with a very few exceptions, students are no longer interested in being disruptive. Some behaviour outside the class, such as the use of inappropriate language, is not always corrected by staff and so continues unchecked. Students are aware that others do not always behave as well as they should. However, there has continued to be a significant reduction in incidents of violent behaviour and students now rarely react aggressively if they are upset. The support team has had a strong impact and the numbers of exclusions have dropped noticeably; incidents requiring positive handling are almost non-existent. Attendance remains below average but has continued to improve. The number of persistent absentees has also reduced although a few remain. It is encouraging to note that, of these, two were supported to attend for their GCSE

examinations. The amount of internal truancy has continued to decline but there are still a small number of students for whom the school is rightly considering alternative programmes to ensure that they do experience learning within school.

Students are increasingly willing to work together or to try things on their own before asking for help. Members of the Student Voice group show that they can consider the benefits of changes, such as the new tutor group system, even though they do not necessarily like them. Students who were spoken to say that they feel safe in school and know who to go to if they are worried. Residential students particularly appreciate the extended range of activities that are available to them. They are rightly proud of their work in the 'Boarding in Bloom' competition. Participation and great success in inter-school events show that students are able to behave well outside the school environment and they represent their school with pride.

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

The unwavering determination of the Principal remains a key factor in driving forward improvement. In this she is joined by a stable senior leadership group who are having demonstrable impact. Senior leaders are now much clearer about the progress being made by groups, as well as individual students, and are able to set more challenging targets as a result. This enables the IEB to hold the school more closely to account. The school improvement plan now needs reviewing and the school rightly intends to update its self-evaluation for the new school year. Training and support from the deputy principal and a senior leader from the Lilac Sky group have ensured that teaching continues to improve. Comprehensive systems for managing the performance of teachers and other staff are in place and the school continues to take rigorous action where weaknesses exist in staff performance. The need for an established middle tier of leadership that was raised at the last monitoring inspection has been resolved well. Similarly, concerns about a possibly restricted curriculum have been allayed. The school has imaginative plans for providing a full curriculum despite relatively low student numbers. This will need to be seen in practice at the next visit. Safeguarding has remained a priority and risk assessments are used well to support health and safety within and outside school. There are now good links across school and boarding and boarding provision makes a significant contribution to the progress and well-being of the students.

### **External support**

The Lilac Sky Schools organisation continues to provide a high level of support to the school. The local authority advisor is providing very useful and effective advice which the school is using well to meet a widening range of special educational needs. The Chair of the Interim Executive Board has a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development as well as the issues surrounding its future sustainability. Discussions need to continue to be held between all partners with regard to the next steps in the school's development.