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5 July 2013

Mr Peter Collins  
Fernhill School & Language College  
Neville Duke Road  
Farnborough  
GU14 9BY

Dear Mr Collins

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Fernhill School & Language College**

Following my visit with Annette Rhodes, Additional Inspector, and Raye Allison-Smith, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3–4 July 2013, 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 and your staff made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 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.

Up to one newly qualified teacher may be appointed in each of the following subjects: English, science, history, music and drama.

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 Governing Body 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 September 2012**

- Ensure that students' achievement and the quality of teaching are good or better by:
  - checking that teachers match their lesson planning to the needs of all students
  - making sure that students' targets are challenging
  - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of students' capabilities
  - making sure that teachers check carefully in lessons that students are making good progress
  
- Ensure senior and middle leaders hold teachers to account for students' progress by:
  - using the new Teachers' Standards to monitor teaching in relation to students' achievement
  - making sure that staff receive training and support in the areas where they need help the most.
  
- Strengthen the role of the governing body in checking the school's performance and in holding senior leaders to account.
  
- Ensure that teachers enable students to take an active part in lessons by:
  - providing regular opportunities for them to share their views and respond to teachers' questions
  - making sure that students are given opportunities to work with other students and are expected to take responsibility for completing their own work.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 3–4 July 2013**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed parts of 25 lessons and made brief visits to three other lessons. Thirteen lesson observations were conducted jointly with school leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documents, including information about students' current achievement and the quality of teaching. They met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, eight class teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors talked to students in lessons and met with three groups of students from Years 8, 9 and 10.

### **Context**

A new head of English joined the school in June. A number of staff appointments have been made for September, notably in mathematics and including a deputy headteacher.

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

The rate of progress made by students in lessons is rising across the school because the quality of teaching in most subjects has improved strongly since the last inspection. Gaps in the performance of different groups of students, such as those that are eligible for free school meals, are narrowing but this area remains a priority for future improvement.

### **The quality of teaching**

Students now have increased opportunities to work together. Teachers plan lessons that are more active and encourage students to work more closely with their peers. Some activities involve students in practical tasks, while others promote the sharing of ideas. Students told inspectors that they enjoy these activities which often stimulate higher levels of engagement and promote deeper understanding of the skills and knowledge they are learning. However, they also identified accurately some inconsistency in the approaches taken by different teachers. Overall, students agreed that the quality of teaching had improved. As a result, they now take greater pride in completing their work promptly and to a higher standard.

Teachers routinely plan lessons that are relevant, organised and well resourced. They are encouraged to experiment with teaching styles. Consequently, the planned activities are more interesting, varied and often innovative. A successful programme of well-considered training opportunities has helped teachers to broaden their repertoire and share effective practice. All teachers now use a range of questions to engage students in lively discussion. Many probe the students' responses to extend their understanding. However, in some lessons, the repertoire of questioning

strategies is more limited and does not always challenge students of different abilities.

Overall, teachers are making better use of information about students' prior attainment to plan lessons that broadly match their needs. However, in too many lessons, this information is not yet used well enough to tailor activities for students of different abilities. In some lessons, students are given exactly the same work to do. In such instances, students of a lower ability find the work too hard or those of a higher ability are not sufficiently challenged. In the best lessons, teachers adapt work carefully. In a successful history lesson, for example, students of different abilities were given source material at varying levels of complexity. This meant that all students could access the topic fully and make progress at a good rate.

In general, students are clear about their overall targets for achievement which are now more ambitious. An ethos of high expectations is common throughout the school. However, students are often less clear about exactly what they need to do to improve their work. In some lessons, the criteria that students are given with which to evaluate the quality of their work are too generic. Consequently, teachers and students find it difficult to assess precisely whether students have made good progress in their learning.

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

The school's systems for collecting, analysing and using information about students' progress and attainment are much improved. Senior and middle leaders now have greater confidence in tracking students' achievement and holding teachers to account for their progress. The school's arrangements for evaluating the performance of teachers are now more rigorous. Teachers' objectives relate to the achievement of students and have stronger links to the Teachers' Standards. Middle leaders have benefited from improved line management arrangements. Their work is now more focused and they have a clearer understanding of their role in monitoring quality. They are able to evaluate the school's strengths accurately. Currently, they are less confident when discussing aspects of the school's work that are not yet good enough.

Leaders observe teaching regularly and often. The feedback that teachers receive following these observations and the developmental targets they are given have led to improved performance in the classroom. Sensibly, this process has focused to a greater extent on the key elements of planning, structuring and teaching lessons that are more collaborative and encourage higher levels of engagement. Work to improve the quality of teaching further must now focus more closely on the impact that teaching has on students' progress and ensuring levels of challenge for students of different abilities. Currently, some teachers who teach subjects other than their main specialism lack sufficient subject knowledge to secure strong student progress. These teachers require tailored support, particularly in relation to gaining a better understanding of progression in learning in their additional subjects.

The governing body is more actively involved in monitoring the work of the school. Its committees are well organised and enable governors to gain a better understanding of the school's work and to ask more challenging questions. Governors visit the school more regularly and their links with specific departments are developing well. Rightly, the Chair of the Governing Body is ensuring that such practices are of a consistently high quality and lead to improvements in provision and outcomes. Governors now have a better understanding of information about students' achievement and are focusing more closely on the performance of different groups. For example, governors have received training on their role in monitoring the school's use of the pupil premium funding and have reviewed the school's action plan for this group. They have not yet had an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's spending or the impact of its actions. The Chair of Governors and the headteacher have worked together successfully to manage recent changes to staffing structures and to plan for the school's sustained improvement.

Changes to the subjects available and the times of the school day have had a positive impact on meeting students' needs and increasing engagement in learning. The option choices that students can make and the learning pathways they can follow have been extended. Recent changes to the modern foreign language curriculum (the school's specialism) are based on sound evaluation. They are designed to ensure that students get a better grounding in their first language, make better progress in their learning and attain more highly in their final examinations.

### **External support**

The local authority district manager has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and those areas of its work that need to improve most urgently. Well-focused support from a range of advisers, consultants and advanced skills teachers has helped to improve the quality of teaching. Support has also strengthened leaders' use of information about students' achievement to set ambitious targets and evaluate teacher performance. The impact of the use of such information at classroom level is less consistent. The school also works productively with independent consultants and other schools. This has had a positive impact on supporting the successful development of those newly qualified teachers who had joined the school in September. The level of external support is now reducing as the school is able to more confidently drive its own improvement.