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20 November 2013

Dr Sean Sweeney  
Action for Children, Parklands Campus  
Bessels Leigh  
Abingdon  
OX13 5AB

Dear Dr Sweeney

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Action for Children, Parklands Campus**

Following my visit to your school on 19 November 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 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 March 2013. 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 proprietor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

**Andrew Redpath**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013**

- Make sure that safeguarding arrangements comply with all statutory requirements and are of consistently high quality.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to enable all students to make the best possible progress in all areas of their learning and development by making sure that:
  - leaders are clear about the type of special educational needs that the school can meet and align provision to ensure that it does this effectively for each student
  - all staff have the skills, knowledge and training to teach and effectively support the students
  - teachers are clear about what they want students to learn in every lesson
  - the content of lessons motivates and engages students in their learning
  - inappropriate behaviour is managed consistently by all staff and all aspects of school life effectively promote students' personal development.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the leadership and management of education, care and governance of the school so that decisions are made in school as far as possible while all leaders are held suitably accountable.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 November 2013**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, met with senior leaders and a group of students, and had a telephone discussion with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). He observed parts of seven lessons, of which five were observed jointly with a Vice Principal.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school roll has fallen from 22 to 16 students. Specialist teachers for mathematics and art have left the school and both posts are being covered on a temporary basis. An experienced teacher has been promoted to lead on the teaching of reading and writing.

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

At the end of Year 11, students gained a mixture of GCSE and Entry Level qualifications in English, mathematics and science, art, and land-based studies. The previous lack of information about students' abilities has prevented the school from knowing whether gaining these qualifications showed students were making enough progress. Good arrangements have now been put in place to establish each student's level of learning. This includes checking students' reading, spelling and comprehension levels and their National Curriculum levels in English, mathematics and science. This information has been used to set targets for improvement against a recognised national benchmark and to identify those students who need additional help to catch up. It is too soon to know the full impact of this work, but early evidence suggests students are beginning to make better progress. Senior leaders have good plans to use the information to check the progress of different groups, for example those eligible for pupil premium funding and those with different special educational needs.

### **The quality of teaching**

The weaknesses in teaching observed at the time of the last full inspection are being tackled successfully. Senior leaders recognise that the next step is to make sure that some of the best practice is consistent across all subjects. Students are generally motivated to learn. They particularly like subjects which draw on their interests, for example music, art and the work-related animal husbandry course. Teachers have clearer lesson plans which focus on what students are expected to learn. The lack of

historic information on students' levels of ability still hampers the setting of work that provides the right level of challenge. Occasionally, this results in concepts being taught which are too difficult for some students to grasp. The marking of students' work is variable, partly because the school does not yet have an agreed marking policy. However, students' work is marked well in some subjects, for example in English, where students receive supportive comments and clear advice on how to improve their work. Respectful relationships between staff and students and the consistent management of behaviour helps to promote students' personal development. Opportunities for students to develop independent study skills vary between lessons. Good examples were seen when students researched information on the computer for an art project, and when they worked with a partner in a mathematics lesson. In a few lessons, students receive too much individual help which discourages them from seeking solutions to problems for themselves.

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

Behaviour has improved markedly since the last full inspection because staff have an agreed approach to managing students' behaviour, underpinned by a clear policy. Information held by the school shows that the number of incidents of challenging behaviour has declined. The improvement is further demonstrated by the fact that students have had only two days of fixed-term exclusion in the summer and autumn terms 2013, compared with 18 days during the spring term 2013. A recent survey of staff views organised by the senior leadership team showed that most staff felt students' behaviour was better and that there was a calmer atmosphere in school. Students who met the inspector described how much the school has improved. They reported that they feel safe and that when incidents of inappropriate behaviour do occur, staff manage them well. Students appreciated how the Interim Principal had made a difference because he was 'firm but fair.' During the monitoring inspection, students' behaviour in lessons and around the school was settled. Students worked hard and generally enjoyed their work. These improved attitudes have been helped by the introduction of a reward system, by which students earn 'points' for attendance, effort and achievement. The 'points' are then exchanged for vouchers that can be spent at local shops. Students also receive certificates and a 'student of the week' award in the weekly assembly.

Students feel more engaged in the life of the school. A school council has been set up which includes a representative from each class. Topics currently being discussed include the length of break times and the setting up of a school 'tuck shop.' While attendance at school is broadly in line with the national average, a small number of students occasionally do not attend lessons. Senior leaders are using the reward system and working closely with parents and carers to tackle this issue.

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

The Interim Principal and two Vice Principals form a purposeful leadership team which is having a visible impact on improving the school. They have a more accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the remaining areas of weakness. The senior leaders recognise that the school is on a journey and they are tackling the most pressing areas for improvement in the right order. Action has been taken in key areas which has established a more stable learning environment and raised expectations of students' achievement.

An effective system for recording and monitoring students' behaviour has been set up which enables senior leaders to look at trends in behaviour. A regular cycle of lesson observations is in place and support is given to those teachers who need it. All staff have received training to better understand the needs of children who have an autistic spectrum condition. The roles and responsibilities of staff have been reorganised to focus on the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. There is uncertainty over some positions currently filled by staff on a temporary basis, although interim arrangements are working well. Staff morale generally has been raised through, for example, participation in a recent team building activity organised by the Action for Children charity.

Information about students' current attainment has been used to group students and to identify those who need additional individual help, especially to improve their basic reading, writing and mathematics. Some of these groups contain students from different year groups. Senior leaders recognise that the organisation of these groups needs careful review to make sure all students are following suitably challenging pathways.

The Interim Executive Board (IEB) is in a better position to ask probing questions about the school's performance because it receives more detailed information about key areas of its work. It is given monthly reports by the Interim Principal on progress against targets in the school's statement of action. Members of the IEB have distinct areas of responsibility and visit the school regularly. The IEB has completed a review of governance and clarified the respective roles and responsibilities of the charitable trust and the governing body. It is intended that members of the IEB will form the basis of a new governing body to be established by January 2014. Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements and appropriate checks are carried out on newly appointed staff to make sure they are suitable to work with children.

### **External support**

Support from an educational consultant has been particularly helpful in equipping senior leaders with the skills to judge teaching and learning more accurately and in providing support to the IEB in developing its responsibilities. Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the proprietor has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. Proposed action is linked more closely to the areas identified for improvement in the last full

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inspection report and useful detail has been added to the steps that are being taken to achieve set targets.