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7 February 2014

Mrs Mary-Nest Richardson  
The Headteacher  
Penn School  
Church Road  
Penn  
High Wycombe  
HP10 8LZ

Dear Mrs Richardson

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

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 February 2014, 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 May 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 removal of special measures.

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 Governing Body, the Education Funding Agency and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it enables all students to make at least good progress, ensuring that:
  - lessons are planned to build on the prior learning of students
  - the intended learning outcomes of all lessons are clear and precise for individuals and groups
  - activities are purposeful and relevant
  - support from adults is always effective in improving learning and promoting students' independence
  - students are encouraged to be more active in lessons and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Improve students' achievement by:
  - ensuring that the assessment of students' current learning is accurate
  - setting challenging targets for students' progress based on their starting points and, where appropriate, according to national expectations
  - regularly monitoring progress to identify any underachievement and intervening when necessary.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - reviewing and clarifying roles, including establishing clear accountabilities for students' progress and for the quality of teaching and the residential provision
  - ensuring leaders, including governors, have the necessary skills in order to carry out their roles and offering training where necessary
  - sharpening monitoring and evaluation procedures so that leaders, including governors, have a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
  - developing school improvement plans that have measurable outcomes and clear timescales and carrying out actions agreed.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 February 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the trustees and a group of students. He held a telephone discussion with an independent educational consultant who has supported the school. The residential provision did not form part of this inspection.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection three senior leaders and two class teachers have left the school. The three senior leadership positions, including the post of deputy headteacher, are currently being covered on a temporary basis. Two class teachers and an experienced teacher to lead on the teaching of science joined the school in January 2014. There have been changes in the membership of the governing body and a new Chair of Governors has been appointed.

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

In June 2013, Year 11 and post-16 students gained a mixture of GCSE and entry level qualifications in English, mathematics, science and art. Some students gained additional level 1 qualifications that included information and communication technology and vocational subjects. The previous lack of information about students' abilities and starting points has prevented the school from knowing whether gaining these qualifications represents good enough progress. Students' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is inconsistent in classes across the school because policies and agreed approaches for teaching these subjects have yet to be agreed and implemented.

Promising systems have been introduced to record students' attainment against National Curriculum levels and to check students' progress. The data are used to set learning targets for students and to identify those who are making slower progress as well as more capable students who need additional challenge. Senior leaders are beginning to analyse the information to check the performance of different groups, which currently shows girls perform slightly better than boys. They recognise that the next step is to moderate teachers' assessments to ensure that the data are accurate.

### **The quality of teaching**

In most lessons there is an appropriate variety of activities which helps to capture students' interest. Good examples were seen in a science lesson when an experiment was used to demonstrate the structure of the earth's crust and in a numeracy lesson when students used a class shop to buy items and apply their knowledge of money. Teachers and support staff manage skilfully the occasional

incidents of anxious behaviour displayed by students with complex communication needs. Signing is used appropriately to support students with hearing impairment. Some staff are assigned to work intensively with individual students. They demonstrate a close understanding of students' complex communication needs which helps to engage these students with learning. In a few lessons, students are given too much help with tasks that they are otherwise able to complete on their own.

Teachers are developing lesson plans which focus more clearly on what students are expected to learn. These plans vary in quality between lessons and they do not always show how activities build on what students know already, or match resources closely to students' ages and ability. As a result, some lessons lack challenge, particularly for the most able students. Many students have a much lower level of reading, writing and mathematics than that expected for their age. Teachers' knowledge of how to help these students make faster progress is too variable and, as a result, many students are not closing the gap with their peers. Changes in senior and subject leadership responsibilities have hindered the establishment of a consistent approach across the school to teaching early reading, writing and numeracy skills.

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

The school provides an orderly environment and in lessons students show a strong desire to learn. Students report that they feel safe and that there is an absence of bullying. They show understanding, and are supportive of each other's needs; for example, in discussion, when more able communicators will assist others in getting their views across. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average for special schools and exclusions are rare. Staff are trained in appropriate methods for managing anxious and challenging behaviour. A behaviour team has been set up recently, including the school's mental health nurse and the head of care, to ensure proper recording and analysis of incidents. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work.

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

Several aspects of leadership and management have been strengthened since the last inspection. The headteacher and senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning through a programme of frequent lesson observations and the scrutiny of students' work. This programme has led to an improvement in broad teaching skills. However, observations do not yet focus sufficiently on monitoring and improving teachers' knowledge of individual subjects. Consequently, some of the school's judgements on the overall quality of teaching and learning are over generous. Teachers, who sometimes teach several subjects to classes that contain students with a wide range of needs, abilities and ages, have not all received sufficient support in developing their skills and subject expertise.

Important policies, including safeguarding, anti-bullying and behaviour management, have been updated. Leadership roles and responsibilities have been reviewed; although, occasionally, there is some overlap in responsibility between middle leaders and other senior staff which blurs accountability. Several senior leaders are new or in acting positions. They show potential and have appropriate plans to improve the school. Most are relatively inexperienced but are developing their roles through a programme of professional development, including support from an external consultant. Due to the departure of some key staff at the end of December 2013, English, mathematics and personal, social and health education do not currently have a lead member of staff to coordinate each subject across the school. This gap in leadership results in the inconsistency of teaching and some students not making enough progress in these subjects.

The governing body is receiving information which gives it a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Some areas that the school is developing are not included in the overall improvement plan and the link between some actions and the raising of students' achievement is not always clear. Governors are involved more closely in the life of the school. They have established new sub-committees to oversee different aspects of the school's work, including teaching and learning, the performance management of staff and implementation of the school's action plan. The governing body has had its role reviewed by an external consultant and drawn up an action plan for strengthening its performance. It is currently engaged in discussions with the trust to clarify respective responsibilities and to review the longer term direction for the school.

### **External support**

The school continues to benefit from the support of an independent educational consultant. He has conducted a review of the governing body and worked with senior leaders to develop their skills in the monitoring of teaching and learning. Officers from Buckinghamshire local authority, from where the school draws the majority of its students, visited the school in October 2013 and provided a helpful report on several aspects of the school's work.