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13 March 2014

Dr Sean Sweeney  
Action for Children, Parklands Campus  
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Dear Dr Sweeney

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

Following my visit to your school on 12 March 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 third 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 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 12 March 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders and the full governing body. He observed five lessons and held informal discussions with students during break time.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection the Interim Executive Board has been replaced by a governing body.

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

Students' achievement continues to improve. Students in Year 11 will take GCSE or equivalent examinations in five subjects at the end of the current academic year. This is a much better picture than at the end of the previous year. Information on students' attainment in mathematics and English is regularly recorded and is included in a termly progress report. School data show that just under half of students are making expected or better progress given their starting points. Some students enter the school following a period of extended absence and with limited information on their level of attainment. Senior leaders recognise that the next steps are to check how quickly students who have a history of underachievement are closing the gap with their peers and how well different groups are performing, for example those with different special educational needs and those who are more capable. There is a much stronger culture of learning in the school and students are more aware of their level of learning and their targets for improvement. This is helped by the weekly 'reflective meetings' which have been introduced to enable students to discuss their progress with their key worker and form tutor.

### **The quality of teaching**

The school has an established team of teachers committed to improving students' learning. Teachers have a better knowledge of students' special educational needs. They have higher expectations and lessons are generally planned to take closer account of students' individual abilities and interests. As a result, students are keen to learn and there is a positive climate for learning in lessons. Some inconsistency remains in the quality of teaching and learning. Information on students' prior learning is not always used effectively to plan lessons which give all students the right level of challenge. This results in some students, especially the most able, making slower progress because the work is too easy. Classes have been organised to take account of students' individual special educational needs. This has been particularly successful in accelerating the learning of students who have needs on the autistic spectrum. There are some good examples of teaching assistants working

effectively on specific programmes with individual students. Occasionally, teaching assistants do not have a clearly defined role in lessons which limits their contribution to students' learning. The use of marking and the presentation of students' work have improved but still vary between subjects. In some subjects marking is detailed and clearly linked to students' learning targets. In others, comments are too general and do not lead to students improving their work. The school has recently drawn up a marking policy to strengthen this aspect of teaching.

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

Staff have a consistent approach to managing students' behaviour which has reduced the incidents of inappropriate behaviour. During the monitoring inspection there was a calm atmosphere in lessons and around the school. Students report that they feel safe and that behaviour has improved over the past year. This view is also shared by the large majority of parents and carers who responded to a recent questionnaire sent out by the school. Students with needs on the autistic spectrum who display anxious behaviour are managed skilfully. They are given time to resolve their difficulties which reduces tension and avoids potential confrontation. Incidents requiring physical intervention or exclusion are now rare and are recorded appropriately.

Students have been encouraged to take on responsibility and play a greater part in school life, for example through the school council. Following suggestions from students, a weekly 'tuck shop' has been set up and a common room created for relaxation at break time. A student representative also reports regularly to the governing body. The programme of outdoor pursuits helps to promote students' self-esteem and self-confidence. Opportunities for students to learn about different cultural and religious traditions are underdeveloped. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average for special schools and the school works closely with families to follow up any absence.

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

The Interim Principal and two Vice Principals continue to provide effective leadership which is ensuring the school is improving at a good pace. They are ambitious for the school and have sharpened the focus on teaching and learning. Systems to check students' progress against challenging targets are now well established. Teaching is monitored half-termly and staff are given feedback to help them improve. Subject leaders for mathematics and English have had their roles extended recently, although they have not yet had time to monitor their subjects across the school and their job descriptions need updating to reflect recent changes.

The curriculum has strengths, particularly in the provision for students on the autistic spectrum and the popular music and farm-based courses. Several students enjoy attending local colleges where they study work-related courses, for example in hair

and beauty, mechanics and catering. Senior leaders recognise that the programme for Key Stage 4 and post-16 students needs further development so that it shows clear pathways and prepares students fully for independence when they leave school. The amount of time allocated to teaching during the school week is slightly less than the recommended minimum for students of secondary age.

The new governing body was established in January 2014. It has a clear brief and is developing its role well. It meets monthly to review progress against targets in the school action plan. Link governors also join senior leaders in discussing aspects of the school's work. The quality of information provided by senior leaders is enabling the governing body to have a better grasp of the school's performance and to provide greater challenge. The governing body is currently reviewing the future direction of the school and the range of special educational needs for which it will provide education. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and appropriate checks are carried out on newly appointed staff and recorded in a single central register.

### **External support**

Senior leaders and the governing body continue to receive support from an educational consultant which has helped strengthen their skills in monitoring the work of the school. The subject leader for mathematics has also worked with a neighbouring special school to help develop lesson plans in mathematics.