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Mrs M Davies-Jones
The Headteacher
Cove School
St John's Road
Cove
Farnborough
GU14 9RN

Dear Mrs Davies-Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cove School

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, three members of your senior team and the head of mathematics. I spoke on the telephone with the local authority school improvement manager. You accompanied me on a tour of the school and I was able to observe aspects of teaching in mathematics, English and history, and speak to a few students about their work and learning targets. I also looked at several students' books to gauge the progress you have made with improving marking and presentation of work. You provided me with a range of data and I evaluated your improvement plan alongside the local authority's statement of action.

Context

Since the last inspection, 10 new members of staff have joined the school, some of whom are new to the profession, having been offered appointments prior to the inspection. During the period between the last inspection and this visit, the governance arrangements have changed. The local authority has replaced the full governing body with an interim executive board (IEB), whose remit is to lead the school out of special measures.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the inspection of March 2014, you and your senior leaders have failed to address the areas identified for improvement with sufficient urgency. Positive actions to bring about improvement are too few. They include:

- the local authority decision to replace the original governing body with an IEB, served by governors of substantial experience
- subject to validation, an improvement in GCSE English outcomes
- the introduction of a system of incentives to reward students for good work and behaviour.

Although leaders lay claim to the success of other strategies, such as the introduction of a new lesson planning template and the implementation of a new marking policy, during this inspection they were unable to evidence how or if these actions have made a difference to students' progress.

The recently revised improvement plan was only this week shared with some staff. Not all members of the senior team have seen it or are fully familiar with its contents. This was evident from discussions with senior staff. Leaders with whom I met attest to frequent changes of roles and a lack of regular meetings at a senior level in which the plan is discussed or progress towards targets is reviewed. Assessment data shared with me during this inspection provided conflicting figures. During meetings, leaders were unable to present a coherent account of the 2014 outcomes.

Short-term targets have not been met. These include GCSE mathematics targets in relation to the 2014 Year 11 cohort, targets relating to the presentation of students' written work and others to do with raising teachers' expectations of outcomes for all learners. During my tour with you, too few of the students with whom I spoke were fully aware of their personal targets. Much of the work I saw was poorly presented. Expectations in mathematics teaching were too low. Although most of the work that I saw was marked across all subjects seen, the quality was variable. Some of the students whose mathematics lessons I visited were visibly bored.

The school improvement plan lacks precision. In its current form it is unclear how it could properly support staff to implement the improvements required. Although you specify a range of actions in relation to each of the areas identified within the previous inspection report, many of these actions are too vague. In particular, you do not indicate how they will be measured in relation to students' progress and attainment. Furthermore, you do not specify how high, middle, low attaining or disadvantaged students' progress will be measured.

Leaders with whom I met do not have clarity about who is accountable within the plan for leading which aspect. Moreover, the plan does not specify who will be

responsible for monitoring each of the key objectives. An important omission is the absence of any actions to improve achievement in Key Stage 3.

Since its inception the IEB has wasted no time in seizing the agenda. The Chair of the IEB understands the nature of the task that lies ahead and recognises that time has been lost. In particular, members of the IEB are aware of the urgent need for effective senior leadership which gains the confidence and trust of staff at all levels. There is an awareness too of the need for all staff to be clear about what is expected of them and how they will be supported to meet challenging targets by subject leaders and members of the senior team.

The local authority took the decision to set up an IEB early in the summer term. However, officers acknowledge that bringing influence to bear in relation to other points for improvement concerning the leadership of the school has been slow. Nevertheless, work is well underway to support both the necessary improvements in mathematics and the development of policies to enable disabled students or those with special educational needs to achieve well. This work has been well received by the school's leaders.

Officers rightly have little confidence in the school's Key Stage 3 data. The local authority statement of action correctly identifies a need for external standardisation. There is now an urgent need for this to take place. Only then will members of the IEB have a secure baseline against which targets for students in Key Stage 3 can be measured with any certainty.

Following the monitoring inspection the judgements indicated below were made:

- The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose. However, the statement will need to be supplemented with short- and medium-term targets for Key Stage 3 as soon as the standardisation has taken place.
- The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.
- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the IEB and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector