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Mr Peter Collins
The Headteacher
Fernhill School
Neville Duke Road
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Dear Mr Collins

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Fernhill School

Following my visit to your school on 17 March, 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 me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the school.

Evidence

The inspector considered evidence including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

leaders and managers have not taken effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Context

Fernhill is smaller than an average secondary school. Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Most pupils are White British and about one in 10 students is from a Nepalese background. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is slightly higher than the national figure. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average. The proportion of students eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding for children who are looked after by the local authority and

students known to be eligible for free school meals) is well above average. You have had some recent difficulties in recruiting staff.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Your actions to address the areas for improvement in behaviour identified at the last inspection have proved only partly successful. Students' attendance is improving and you have successfully eliminated almost all racist language. However, behaviour in lessons is not improving rapidly enough and the use of the word 'gay' in casual conversation has not been tackled effectively. You have taken some well-considered actions to improve behaviour. Staff have received training on managing behaviour and have received a helpful behaviour management guide. This suitably clarifies the expectations leaders have of teachers. You set up The Phoenix Centre in September 2014 to provide support for students who have challenging behaviour. This is starting to help some students to improve their behaviour and cope with mainstream lessons. However, overall, the work to improve behaviour has not had sufficient impact on general classroom behaviour.

A sizeable minority of students, most noticeably in Years 7 and 8, have not learnt to manage their own behaviour. When teaching does not engage these students' interests their behaviour is silly and disrupts learning. Some teachers accept this poor behaviour. Attempts to tackle it are limited and unsuccessful. In several lessons visited during the inspection, poor behaviour went unchallenged. Where teaching is stronger, teachers have high expectations and efficient routines. Students engage in their learning and typically behave well. Most students move swiftly and sensibly around the school between lessons. However, not all teachers keep watch on behaviour in corridors outside their classrooms. Some students use this as an opportunity to indulge in noisy and, at times, unruly behaviour. Your records confirm that behaviour has not improved as much as needed since the last inspection. Additionally, as some teachers do not challenge poor behaviour, incidents go unreported. So the exact extent of poor behaviour in the school is unclear to leaders.

Students' behaviour around the site before school, at break, lunchtime and the end of the school day is calm and orderly. Students have positive relationships with the teachers supervising them. Students are polite and respectful to one another. They socialise together well. However, students say this is not always the case and there are times when arguments flare up between students and others get involved. I did not see this behaviour during the visit and you have no record of such incidents happening recently. Your records also show that incidents of bullying are low and suitably resolved. Yet students reported that bullying, although less prevalent than previously, was quite common. Students spoken too said they would not necessarily report bullying as they were not sure teachers would deal with it effectively. However, some students felt that what others described as bullying was in fact friends falling out. Leaders must take action to discover the exact extent to which these behaviours occur and address them as needed.

Your work to tackle the use of racist language has proved effective. Students from different ethnic backgrounds say there is no racism in the school and students of different races get on well together. However, students are clear that other types of name calling are common, and the use of the word 'gay' to mean 'rubbish' is often heard in general conversation. Some students are not sure why this is inappropriate. Girls expressed frustration about sexist attitudes they hear at school, for example

boys telling them they should go and make the sandwiches or saying, 'You throw like a girl,' as an insult. Two students were heard using sexist language during the visit.

Students' attendance is improving. The proportion of students with poor attendance has decreased. Fewer students with special educational needs have poor attendance than previously. The introduction of a family support worker, a governors' attendance panel and an increase in prosecutions of parents who do not make sure their children attend regularly have all contributed well to this.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make sure all teachers have high expectations for students' behaviour in lessons and have the skills needed to bring it about.
- Ensure that leaders and governors have a sharp understanding of all aspects of behaviour in the school and act effectively to address areas of concern.
- Make sure students understand why the use of the word 'gay' to mean 'rubbish' is oppressive, so they make a positive choice to not use the word in that manner.
- Raise students' understanding of issues related to discrimination and equality in all its forms, so no student feels marginalised.
- Make sure that students have no well-grounded concerns about bullying, intimidating behaviour or name calling.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Chouleton
Her Majesty's Inspector