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12 June 2015

Liz Jones  
Headteacher  
Oakmere Primary School  
Chace Avenue  
Potters Bar  
EN6 5NP

Dear Ms Jones

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Oakmere Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 11 June 2015, 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 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the school.

### **Evidence**

I 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 on how the school monitors pupils' attendance and behaviour, including bullying and racist incidents
- 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 maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

### **Context**

The senior leadership of the school has changed since the last inspection. You became headteacher in September 2014, having previously been deputy headteacher. Another teacher was recruited from the existing staff to become deputy headteacher.

The school is slightly larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are White British; Travellers of Irish heritage form the next largest ethnic group. The stability of the school population is well below average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority) is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. Although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is well above average, the overall proportion with special educational needs is below average.

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

Published data show that pupils' attendance has been consistently below average in recent years. The rate of attendance is in the lowest 20% of all schools in the country. You provided me with data for this academic year. This shows that current attendance levels are even further below the national average. Some pupils at the school are highly mobile and are frequently absent from school, sometimes for long periods. You provided me with additional attendance figures that did not include these pupils; although the figure was higher than for the school as a whole, it was not dramatically so and attendance remains below the national average. Punctuality is also a problem for the school and I counted 20 pupils arriving after the start of the school day.

The school has a number of strategies in place to tackle pupils' absence and to ensure that attendance is monitored closely. An escalating series of letters is sent to parents as their children's attendance causes increasing concern. The local authority's attendance officer monitors absence regularly. The school has issued four fixed penalty notices to parents this year in response to their children's poor attendance. However, although the school is taking a number of appropriate actions, attendance has yet to improve and, indeed, is poorer overall than at the point of the last inspection.

I spoke to a number of parents before and after school. The vast majority were very positive about the school generally and about behaviour specifically. They told me that bullying is not an issue at Oakmere and said that staff deal with problems effectively when they arise. However, a very small minority of parents said that their children had experienced bullying, including racist bullying, and it had not been dealt with as well as they would have liked.

The school does not currently keep a separate log of either bullying allegations or racist incidents. This means that the school is unable to monitor the nature and frequency of incidents or to show that allegations have been investigated thoroughly. Behavioural incidents are recorded on a spreadsheet that is accessible to all teachers via a shared computer drive. Although this system provides a record of incidents that have happened, it is very limited and does not allow you to analyse the data or to look for patterns of behaviour in the incidents reported.

Pupils are polite and friendly. They were keen to speak to me and to tell me about their school. I held meetings with two groups of pupils and also spoke informally to

children on the playground, in the dinner hall and during lessons. Pupils were very positive and told me that they enjoy coming to school. However, pupils also said that, in lessons, children distract each other by jiggling tables, shouting out and making silly noises. They told me that pupils 'talk over the teacher' and do not always stop and listen when the teacher asks them to. Pupils also said that there is some racist name calling in the school but they do not perceive this to be bullying. Pupils were very confident that staff deal with any problems as they arise.

My observations show that pupils have good attitudes to learning and enjoy their lessons. In a Year 4 dance lesson and a Year 4 drumming lesson, pupils behaved particularly well and showed great interest in what they were doing. Nonetheless, the pupils' descriptions of behaviour in the classroom match my observations closely, indicating that some low level disruption is typical. In the majority of classes I observed, pupils did not all stop and listen when the teacher addressed the class; some pupils carried on talking and this was not tackled by the teachers. I observed other off-task behaviour during teachers' input to the class, such as giggling, fiddling with shoes, wriggling about and tapping another child with a pencil. Teachers accepted rather than dealt with this low-level disruption. Similarly, when walking in from the playground, pupils were noisy and boisterous. Again, this was not tackled by staff and there was no expectation that pupils would enter the building quietly.

I observed play times in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Pupils were well-occupied and played happily together. Both playgrounds were supervised appropriately and staff intervened effectively when necessary. Pupils also behaved well in the lunch hall: queuing sensibly, chatting to their friends and clearing up after themselves.

Effective systems are in place to support pupils who have particular behavioural needs. Pupils told me that staff 'give us strategies' and 'give us time to calm down'. Pupils described how the nurture room is effective in providing them with space to calm down and an adult to talk to. Again, pupils' descriptions matched my observations closely. Staff manage pupils with specific behavioural needs very well and provide appropriate support to help pupils learn to control their own behaviour.

The school's 'golden sun' and 'grey cloud' behaviour management system is used throughout the school. All pupils that I spoke to told me about 'RRR' and described clearly how 'rights, respect and rules' is the school's motto. Pupils told me that they value golden time (reward time) on Fridays and that teachers use the grey clouds and golden sun system fairly.

In addition to the concerns identified about pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning, this visit also raised concerns about the school's attention to health and safety. I shared my anxiety with you about the potential hazards and lack of adequate supervision in early years and also, specifically, that there are no private changing facilities for children that need help with their personal care.

The school's single central register meets current statutory safeguarding requirements. However, safer recruitment recommendations in the statutory guidance *Keeping children safe in education* are not being followed closely enough. Written references are not sought routinely when midday supervisory assistants are

appointed and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I have asked the local authority to check that this has been done by the end of this month.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Improve attendance to at least the national average.
- Improve punctuality so that all pupils routinely arrive at school on time.
- Raise staff expectations of what is acceptable behaviour and ensure that low-level disruptive behaviour is routinely tackled by, for example, making sure that all pupils stop and listen whenever a teacher addresses the class.
- Ensure that safer recruitment recommendations in the statutory guidance *Keeping children safe in education* are followed fully.
- Improve the way that behavioural incidents are logged so that behaviour can be monitored, analysed and tracked more closely. Improve systems for recording racist incidents and allegations of bullying.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

cc. Chair of the Governing Body  
cc. Director of Children's Services, Hertfordshire County Council