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1 July 2015

Mrs Sarah Howells  
Executive Headteacher  
Cove School  
St John's Road  
Farnborough  
GU14 9RN

Dear Mrs Howells

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

Following my visit with Matthew Newberry, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Margaret Faull, Additional Inspector, to your school on 30 June-1 July, 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 2014. 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 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by ensuring that all teachers:
  - raise their expectations of what students, especially those eligible for the pupil premium funding, are capable of achieving
  - use assessment information about students' prior attainment to set more demanding work for all groups of students
  - consistently check students' understanding in lessons and then adapt activities if the work is too hard or too easy
  - when marking students' work, tell students exactly how it can be improved and subsequently check that students are responding to these comments
  - always insist on high standards of presentation in students' work
  - have the highest expectations of behaviour and make sure that students demonstrate good attitudes to learning.
  
- Raise achievement in mathematics so that students make at least the progress expected of them and do as well as in English by:
  - making rapid and sustained improvements in mathematics a priority in the school's improvement plans and include specific, measureable targets to check the impact of actions
  - ensuring there are rigorous checks on teaching and learning in mathematics lessons and acting decisively when the quality is found to be less than good
  - ensuring that the subject leader for mathematics is supported and challenged to secure long-term, sustainable improvements to the quality of teaching and the achievement of students.
  
- Improve the impact of leadership, including governance, on students' achievement by ensuring that:
  - targets for school improvement are far more challenging
  - leaders at all levels, especially governors, have a consistently good understanding of the school's performance and the skills required to drive rapid improvement
  - all improvement plans are more sharply focused on securing consistently good teaching and at least good student achievement in all areas of the school's work
  - school systems are consistently and robustly applied by all, especially subject leaders, when making judgements about teaching and students' achievement
  - inadequate teaching and leadership are dealt with more swiftly
  - leaders act more quickly to address underachievement when identified and can show the impact of their work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 30 June-1<sup>st</sup> July 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed parts of 30 lessons and made brief visits to one or two other lessons. Almost all lessons were conducted jointly with school leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentation, including information about students' current achievement, the updated action plans and leaders' analyses of the quality of teaching. Meetings were held with three groups of students. Meetings were also held with senior leaders and a group of middle leaders. Inspectors also met with the school improvement manager for Rushmoor and Hart and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), along with two other board members.

### **Context**

Since the second monitoring visit, a number of key staffing changes have taken place. IEB members have recruited for a newly created post of head of school. The acting headteacher has been appointed to the role of executive headteacher and will remain in post until such time as the school is removed from special measures. Several other teachers have left, or will be leaving at the end of this term.

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

Current achievement although improving, remains variable overall, because teaching is not yet consistently good. Strong gains have been made in improving the quality of information available to teachers to inform their planning, especially in relation to the learning needs of disabled students and/or those with special educational needs and disadvantaged students. Since the previous visit, leaders have supplemented the work initiated in this area so that each teacher is now in receipt of detailed information which identifies the most effective strategies to use with targeted students. During this visit, in some instances, inspectors were able to observe good use being made of this helpful information. However, this was not universally the case.

In order to improve urgently GCSE results at the end of Year 11, leaders at all levels have made achievement in Key Stage 4 a priority. Senior leaders now express confidence that GCSE results in 2015 will significantly improve, including for disadvantaged students. Their confidence is informed by improvements in the quality of teachers' assessments, which have been verified by local authority advisers. Equally, teachers' checking and identification of students lagging behind have significantly improved. However, achievement in Key Stage 3 is less secure. In certain subject areas, such as English, PE and science, positive moves have already been made to identify what needs to be taught and how it will be assessed in readiness for the move away from assessing students' learning through the use of national curriculum levels. In these subject areas, achievement is improving because the process of re-evaluation has required teachers to think more critically about

what they want students to achieve and how to go about it. However, in other subject areas, such as in mathematics, where, throughout the academic year, there have been disproportionate numbers of temporary teachers, younger students' learning has been slower. During this visit, inspectors observed students in Key Stage 3 repeating learning from their primary school mathematics which was too easy, with no extra level of challenge provided. Senior leaders will now need to ensure that these students are made a priority next term and that sufficient opportunities are provided for them to catch up and benefit from sustained good quality teaching that builds effectively on what they already know.

### **The quality of teaching**

Leaders have worked hard to ensure that teachers are equipped fully with the necessary support, guidance and training to improve securely the impact of teaching on learning. During this inspection, there was clear evidence of teachers applying newly acquired skills with varying degrees of success. All teachers now demonstrate a growing awareness of which students in their groups are vulnerable to under-achievement and how they can help these students to meet their challenging targets. However, not all teachers are able to fully translate high quality plans and challenging learning objectives into a good learning experience for all students.

Teachers' willingness to engage with the improvement agenda is clear for all to see. Through close monitoring and training, leaders have been successful in helping targeted staff to develop their teaching so that more of it is consistently good than in the past. The new prevailing culture is typified by teachers' willingness to talk freely about their professional learning, share their successes and draw on each other's skills and expertise to improve their effectiveness. This type of professional dialogue was not encouraged in the past and has been welcomed by staff, who feel supported well to improve.

In particular, senior leaders have been successful in building teachers' confidence and abilities to identify students who are lagging behind so that the necessary support can be provided to help students catch up. In the past, teachers lacked reliable data and were not empowered to identify under-achievement for fear of being identified as failing. This is no longer the case. As a result, effective additional help has been correctly triggered across most subjects, especially in Key Stage 4, including in mathematics, where achievement was especially weak in the past.

Teachers diligently apply the school's policies on setting homework and marking. Inspectors did not find evidence of work that was unmarked. However, in a few instances where temporary staff have been employed, less frequent marking was a feature. A very recent re-run of a student questionnaire first circulated in January attests to significant increases in student satisfaction in all areas concerning teaching. In particular there was a 20% increase in the numbers of students who

feel that teachers value their work. This also reflects the value they attach to teachers' feedback and marking. However, not all of the marking scrutinised was of equal benefit. Leaders now need to evaluate how well the new approach is moving students forward in their learning and share examples of the best practice with all staff.

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

Students' conduct in and around the building is good. At break-times and changeover of lessons, students are respectful and move promptly to their next lessons in an orderly fashion. A recent crackdown on uniform has appropriately re-enforced for students an expectation that they present smartly, on time and consequently ready to learn. Teachers' expectations of students' behaviour and attendance are now higher than in the past. As a result, absence rates have improved and the number of days lost compared with the same time last year is now in line with what is seen in other schools nationally and is significantly lower than in the past.

In lessons, students' attitudes to learning are closely aligned to the quality of the teaching they receive. In general, students contribute with enthusiasm and high levels of engagement where good teaching challenges them to reflect and fosters their curiosity to dig deeper to consider alternative solutions. However, even where teaching is dull, although students' progress slows down, their positive dispositions ensure that they endure rather than engage fully with their learning.

Students with whom inspectors met, were positive in their views about the school. They understand about the forms of bullying that exist and assert that they feel safe. Although a few stated that bullying sometimes occurs, they also felt it is dealt with appropriately and they know whom to turn to if they are concerned or at all anxious.

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

Since the previous monitoring visit, IEB members have sought to provide both sustainable leadership and additional capacity at a senior level, in which all stakeholders can take faith. Sensible changes to the senior leadership structure through the firming up of arrangements for the executive headteacher to remain in post and the creation of a post of head of school have already provided the certainty that staff and parents require. Since his appointment, the head of school has begun to get to grips with his monitoring role. He brings with him a valuable additional external perspective which teachers and other leaders have found helpful in moving their thinking forward.

In particular, the executive headteacher and other senior leaders have worked closely with middle leaders to strengthen their capacity to lead the staff in their teams effectively and help them interpret fully what is expected of them. In meetings with subject and pastoral leaders, inspectors found that middle leaders understand clearly their responsibilities and now feel empowered to lead in ways that were not encouraged in the past. Their commitment to the vision for improvement is a striking feature, despite a clear recognition of the significant amount of work ahead of them, if they are to succeed in improving students' achievement to the level of 'good'.

In mathematics, an area of serious weakness in the past, leaders have worked effectively alongside remaining staff to develop and build their confidence, skills and expertise, while also setting challenging targets for improvement. This intensive approach, led by the deputy headteacher internally, coupled with a judicious use of the local authority advisory team members, is beginning to yield improvements. In particular, in Key Stage 4 mathematics, teachers' monitoring and checking have enabled them to identify successfully those students who have been in need of extra help and support. A new leader for mathematics has been appointed and work is already underway to review the curriculum and the way it is taught. The department now has a clear and appropriate action plan, informed by a strong vision for its success, to which remaining staff have contributed and are determined to implement successfully.

Leaders at all levels recognise that the school is closer to, but not yet ready for, the removal of special measures because achievement is not yet improving securely enough across all year groups. Nevertheless, senior leaders have made good gains in training and coaching staff to support and challenge them collectively and individually to raise their game. In particular, the executive headteacher has been highly successful in inspiring staff at all levels to re-engage with their professional learning, without fear of failure. Senior and middle leaders are aware that after a period of largely prescribed training for all staff, their training programme for next year must now move to a more bespoke model for each staff member, informed by an accurate needs analysis and the outcomes of the newly introduced performance management processes, reported on in the previous monitoring visit.

### **External support**

Leaders continue to draw wisely on helpful advice and input from the local authority advisory service. In particular, there is close liaison between the IEB and officers of the local authority. Local authority officers have been instrumental in helping IEB members to broker a longer term solution to the leadership of the school, in order to secure the successful removal of special measures. An ongoing dialogue between IEB members and local authority officers is also helping to ensure that all avenues in

relation to the school's future and the need to sustain its trajectory of improvement are given full and proper consideration.

In the meantime, input from subject advisers, particularly in mathematics, is helping to secure greater confidence in teachers' teaching and assessments. At the time of this visit, the school improvement manager for Rushmoor and Hart had also scheduled a review of provision for disadvantaged students, to be conducted before the end of this term.