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John Reilly  
Interim Headteacher  
Lakers School  
Five Acres  
Coleford  
Gloucestershire  
GL16 7QW

Dear Mr Reilly

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

Following my visit with Jim Sage, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Deirdre Fitzpatrick and Duncan Millard, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 28 and 29 June 2016, 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 that 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 that took place in December 2015.

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

### **Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2015**

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make faster progress from their individual starting points by:
  - increasing the level of challenge for pupils of all abilities
  - improving the quality of teachers' questioning so that it more effectively develops pupils' ability to think deeply about what they are learning
  - ensuring that teachers have higher expectations of pupils' work and behaviour in all lessons
  - improving the quality of the feedback teachers give pupils on their work so that it always enables them to make rapid progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding
  - improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments so that the school's systems for tracking pupils' performance provide more secure evidence of their progress.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
  - ensuring that school leaders and governors work together more effectively to tackle the school's history of low attainment and poor progress
  - spending the extra funding provided by the government for disadvantaged pupils in an efficient and timely manner so that the gaps between their outcomes and those of other pupils nationally close significantly
  - clarifying the roles of those middle leaders responsible for pupils' progress so that lines of accountability are clear
  - improving the school's training for teachers so that the quality of teaching improves quickly.

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 management may be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2016**

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, we met with you, senior and middle leaders, teachers, groups of pupils, and representatives from the interim executive board and the local authority. Inspectors observed learning in classrooms, with some observations being conducted jointly with senior leaders, and scrutinised pupils' work. We also considered a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, progress information and external monitoring reports.

### **Context**

There have been a number of significant changes since the previous inspection. Following a review of governance, the governing body was disbanded and an interim executive board put in place by the local authority. You were appointed as interim headteacher in January 2016, to oversee the school's conversion from school to academy. To this end, a preferred sponsor was identified in April 2016 and a process of due diligence is now taking place.

A deputy headteacher and the current special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) will be leaving at the end of this academic year. An interim assistant headteacher has been seconded from the local authority and an interim SENCo has been appointed for the autumn term. However, you have yet to make a substantive appointment. You appointed three teachers in February 2016 in English, mathematics and science. A further four teachers in these subjects are due to take up post in September 2016.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

Many aspects of leadership have improved since the last inspection, which in turn is having a positive effect on the quality of teaching and behaviour. Leaders at all levels have a clear understanding of the school's weaknesses and are totally committed to addressing the areas for development arising from the previous inspection. This shared understanding of the need to do better, allied to the determined and purposeful leadership that you provide, has ensured that staff morale is high. Staff are rising to the challenge because you have instilled confidence, given them greater responsibility and are holding them to account.

The school improvement plan provides appropriate direction because it succinctly focuses upon the key priorities and actions necessary to achieve them. Appropriate milestones have been set to enable leaders to chart the progress of actions effectively.

You are not afraid to tackle staff underperformance and are in the process of introducing more robust systems to monitor the performance of staff. As a result, staff are more aware of your expectations, and this is having a positive impact upon the quality of teaching and learning. You disbanded the faculty structure so that subject leaders are able to take more responsibility for their work and the progress that pupils make. You acknowledge rightly, however, that leaders need to hold staff to account more rigorously over the progress that pupils make. They need to do this by triangulating teaching observed in lessons with the work in pupils' books and the outcomes they achieve.

You and other senior leaders are working effectively with the interim executive board to tackle areas for improvement. Board members bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their role, so that they focus unswervingly on the key issues, ask the right questions and hold leaders to account. For example, the board swiftly commissioned a review of pupil premium funding and has worked with leaders to act upon its recommendations. As a result, a detailed plan is in place and funding allocated appropriately. Board members are now very keen to see the impact of provision upon achievement. The interim executive board is highly committed to the school and members want to see rapid success. This shows itself not only in the high expectations they have of leaders but also the support that is provided to them.

Leaders are reassuringly open and outward looking. They are keen to take advantage of support available beyond the school, so that teachers' professionalism and expertise continue to develop. Dene Magna School has provided invaluable support through training in aspects of classroom practice, such as questioning and feedback to pupils.

The school is currently in the process of becoming an academy. The local authority is working effectively with the preferred sponsor, South Gloucestershire and Stroud Academy Trust, so that the school will become an academy towards the end of 2016 or the beginning of 2017.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teaching is improving overall because teachers are becoming more accountable for the progress that pupils make and because recent training and professional development have improved classroom practice. There is a collective will among teachers to become better practitioners, to be open to new ideas and techniques, and to adopt new ways of working. As a result, teachers are giving greater thought to planning so that activities match the needs of pupils to a greater degree. This approach is not as effective as it might be, however, because some teachers do not approach planning and execution from the position of the learner sufficiently. Consequently, some teachers plan activities without fully knowing what impact they will have in terms of learning and progress for individuals in the class.

Although teaching is improving overall, certain aspects of practice are developing inconsistently across teachers and within subjects. Teachers are now more aware of the value of questioning to explore themes and ideas, and are questioning with greater frequency. However, some teachers are not asking questions of sufficient complexity designed to deepen thinking; nor are they directing questions carefully enough at specific pupils. As a result, pupils' needs, particularly those of the most able, are not always adequately met.

Teachers are applying written feedback more consistently than before. However, the impact of feedback upon pupils' progress is variable across teachers and subjects. Where feedback is used well, teachers provide clear, succinct advice that pupils understand and are able to act upon to improve their work. Teachers then monitor pupils' efforts to act upon the advice closely and provide further direction to ensure that they make rapid progress. Not all teachers are using feedback effectively, however. In some cases, teachers are 'going through the motions' and the advice has little practical value. Consequently, pupils do not understand what they are being asked to do, or are unable to do it, and as a result, fail to improve their work.

Most teachers are beginning to demand more of pupils and this is apparent most visibly in terms of pupils' conduct in lessons. Pupils behave well; they follow instructions quickly and set to work without complaint. They also collaborate well with each other when required to work in groups. Pupils' attitudes to learning are not universally strong, however, because some teachers do not have expectations of pupils' learning that match the high expectations of their behaviour. This lack of challenge means that some pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable. Where teachers are providing insufficient challenge, standards of presentation in pupils' work are not high enough and there is little evidence that skills are developing over time.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils are polite and friendly. They are considerate to each other, staff and visitors. The school campus is tidy and free of litter because pupils respect the school environment. For the most part, pupils move around the building in an orderly and sensible way. However, some pupils reported that there can be some 'shoving' in corridors during lesson change-over times.

Pupils are loyal to the school and enjoy their school experience. They report that the school has improved, in large part because of you and the changes you have implemented. Pupils feel respected and acknowledge that some lessons are now more challenging. They recognise that you have raised expectations of teachers and they feel that they learn more in their lessons as a result. Pupils also know that staff have higher expectations of their behaviour because you have made clear that 'actions have consequences'.

Safeguarding is effective. Pupils are safe in school and report that they feel safe. Checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children are in place and up to date. Staff have had appropriate training so that they are clear about child protection procedures and know whom to speak to if they have concerns. Leaders also work effectively with other agencies such as social care and the police to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support. Pupils receive effective guidance for staying safe online through assemblies and enrichment sessions. They also reported that bullying has declined since you took up post and that it is dealt with effectively when it does occur. However, leaders do not have a clear overview of behaviour because records are not written in sufficient detail or ordered systematically.

Leaders are very aware of the need to improve attendance. It is monitored closely for groups of pupils, and leaders employ different strategies in an effort to improve it. However, attendance is not currently improving. This is, in part, because a large number of pupils join the school during the school year, affecting the school's overall attendance figures. It is also because leaders are not clear about which of the strategies used to increase attendance are the most effective.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Pupils in the school are now making stronger progress than they were prior to the last inspection. This is because there have been clear, undoubted improvements in many aspects of leadership and because the quality of teaching is improving overall. Understandably, leaders have prioritised pupils in Year 11, particularly in English and mathematics, in order to prepare them for their GCSE examinations. As a result, pupils have been set aspirational targets, their progress has been closely tracked and they have received additional support according to need. The school's own progress information indicates that Year 11 pupils were making progress before leaving the school that was comparable with the national average.

Leaders are less certain about the progress being made by pupils in other year groups, particularly at key stage 3. This is because leaders and teachers are not using assessment information to best effect. In particular, leaders are not using this information to challenge teachers sufficiently about the underperformance of pupils. Correspondingly, some teachers are not using the information to set realistic yet challenging targets, track pupils' progress accurately and intervene where necessary to help pupils catch up. Those teachers who do set appropriate targets know their pupils well; they use pupils' work to inform their judgements and regularly monitor progress to ensure the accuracy of assessments.

Disadvantaged pupils are now being assisted to make better progress than they did before the last inspection. This is because leaders have detailed and fully costed plans in place outlining the actions being taken to improve the achievement of these pupils. Pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress, but leaders, including members of the interim executive board, recognise that gaps are not yet closing between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in the school and nationally.

In the main, the most able pupils are being supported to make rapid progress. In many subjects, teachers are setting challenging work and demanding more from these pupils. Where this is the case, pupils' work is extensive across a range of subjects, and showcases original thinking, sophisticated writing skills and a rich exploration of ideas. Some of the work produced by the most able pupils indicates, however, that the needs of these pupils are not met universally by all teachers. For example, uninspiring feedback provided in some pupils' work does not encourage them to develop more advanced skills or tackle more taxing concepts.

Leaders are right to recognise that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making progress that is rapid enough. This is because classroom teachers are not being provided with appropriate strategies to support these pupils and because there is insufficient monitoring of pupils' progress. Teaching assistants are providing an effective level of support for pupils, however. Arrangements have been put in place recently to strengthen the line management of this department, but it is too soon for any impact to be visible.

### **External support**

Since the school went into special measures, leaders have received strong, effective support from the local authority. It was responsible for forming, and chairing, the project group, to monitor the school's progress towards the lifting of special measures. The group takes its role seriously and has been conscientious in its work. As a result, the project group has a sharp understanding of how well leaders are addressing areas for improvement and is holding them to account. The local authority was also instrumental in making your appointment and influencing the formation of the interim executive board. Both of these decisions have helped to move the school forward rapidly in the last six months.

The local authority also helped to broker the support of Dene Magna School. This school is providing valuable training to staff, which is helping to improve the quality of teaching.

By the time of the second monitoring visit, it is expected that:

- senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers use assessment information more effectively to track pupils' progress and identify underperformance
- pupils make more rapid progress because the feedback they receive in the full range of subjects enables them to improve their work
- pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make more progress because teachers use a range of strategies in the classroom to assist them
- gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are closing because the actions taken by staff to support these pupils enable them to make more progress.