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Mr Simon Duffy
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Duffy

Special measures monitoring inspection of Chipping Norton School

Following my visit with Gary Holden, Her Majesty's Inspector, and John Burridge, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 November 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

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

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will

be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Haynes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Make rapid and secure improvements to the progress of disadvantaged pupils (those who are eligible for government funding known as the pupil premium) by:
 - prioritising their achievement in planning at all levels
 - monitoring the impact of the pupil premium expenditure closely and frequently
 - making sure that their attendance at least matches the average attendance of other pupils nationally
 - ensuring that leaders and governors check that necessary improvements have been made at appropriate points throughout the year.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - setting out in the development plan clear targets and descriptions of what will be achieved at key points in the year to enable senior leaders and governors to monitor the impact of actions throughout the year
 - ensuring that judgements of the quality of teaching take account of its impact on pupils' learning over time
 - improving performance management systems to support better teaching and learning
 - extending senior leaders' and governors' understanding of good and outstanding practice
 - ensuring that governors use a range of information about outcomes for all groups of pupils to offer effective challenge and support to senior leaders.
- Improve the progress of all pupils, especially in English, by ensuring that teaching:
 - provides consistent and high levels of challenge, appropriate to pupils' needs and abilities
 - improves pupils' progress in key stage 3 so that they begin GCSE courses with a strong foundation
 - enables pupils currently in key stage 4 to catch up to make up for previous poor learning
 - eliminates any low level disruption to lessons.

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.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 November 2016

Evidence

Inspectors visited 26 lessons; all but one of these visits was conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at a very wide range of pupils' work and spoke to pupils in prearranged meetings, in lessons and around the school. Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, teachers, governors (including the chair of the governing body) and a group of parents. Inspectors scrutinised school documentation including safeguarding records, the school's action plan and records of leaders' monitoring. Inspectors considered 193 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire). Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour including at lunch and breaktimes. The lead inspector held separate telephone conversations with the chief executive officer (CEO) of River Learning Trust and with an adviser from the regional schools commissioner's (RSC) office.

Context

Eight teachers and 10 support staff have left since the last monitoring inspection; seven teachers and three support staff have joined. This includes a new leader of the sixth form and two part-time special educational needs coordinators while the substantive post holder is on maternity leave.

The school is due to join the River Learning Trust, a multi-academy trust based relatively locally in Oxford, in February or March 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders are now taking the right actions to make crucial improvements. Leaders have raised their expectations significantly and are communicating these successfully to staff. Spearheaded by work to improve teaching and track pupils' progress effectively, leaders have rightly prioritised provision in English and disadvantaged pupils' outcomes and attendance. They are also working effectively to raise standards of pupils' behaviour and achievement across the school. Governors' resolve, evident at the last monitoring inspection, has translated into concrete action.

Leaders have set out an ambitious and practical vision of the features of good-quality teaching. They have revised teachers' training in light of this so that teachers get the support they need to make improvements. Leaders' monitoring of teaching is regular, accurate and rightly linked to pupils' progress. This now means that leaders are targeting their support much more precisely and proportionately. As a result, teaching is beginning to improve.

Pupils' progress is now tracked closely in both key stages 3 and 4. Linked to this,

leaders are holding teachers much more to account for pupils' learning. Clear targets are set for what pupils need to achieve. Subject leaders have a defined role in improving teaching and accelerating pupils' progress. Leaders and teachers are, therefore, much better placed to intervene effectively and swiftly when pupils' learning is not good enough. There is some evidence of the early positive effect of this work, but there is still much to do: pupils' achievement, including that of disadvantaged pupils, remains variable and at times too slow.

Leaders have revised the school's action plan well and have wasted no time in the last six months putting it into practice. Consequently, the rate of improvement since the last monitoring inspection has been good. However, because leaders had not taken effective action prior to that, there is some lost ground to make up. Importantly, while leaders have made progress establishing critical processes and systems to support improvement, they have yet to plan formally how they are going to consolidate these to have the necessary impact on teaching and pupils' outcomes in the coming months.

There is clear evidence that the sixth form remains good. The ambitious new leader in charge of the sixth form has got to grips very quickly with what needs to improve further and has put the right actions in place to achieve this in a timely way. Few disadvantaged pupils enter the sixth form because they have not achieved highly enough in the past to meet the entry requirements. Leaders are aware of this issue and are beginning to address it.

Governors are consciously balancing two critical areas of work well. First, they are monitoring and evaluating leaders' work to make improvements in a more meticulous and tenacious fashion. Governors are well informed, have an accurate view of the school and regularly challenge leaders effectively. Second, governors are working diligently with the River Learning Trust and the Department for Education to ensure a smooth transition into this multi-academy trust.

Parents, including those to whom inspectors spoke during the inspection, remain overwhelmingly supportive of the school. In particular, they have noticed improvements to teaching, especially in English. They feel well informed about the school's progress and perceive that communications between the school and parents have improved.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are working hard to put leaders' new principles for effective teaching into practice. Teachers are trying to challenge pupils more purposefully, including the most able pupils. Where this is working well, pupils are beginning to make better progress. For example, in an English lesson the teacher had high expectations of all pupils regardless of their ability, carefully tailoring work to make sure pupils reached the same high standards. Leaders are rightly making better use of this kind of strong practice by sharing it more widely across the school. However, while

improving overall, teaching remains variable in quality because levels of challenge are still inconsistent.

Teachers are now fully aware of pupils' targets and their differing needs. This is particularly true of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, inspectors observed examples of where disadvantaged pupils are making better progress because they are getting the specific help and challenge they need to learn more. This is not yet the norm, however: at times, their work did not show the necessary rapid improvement because they are not getting the depth or range of help they need. Leaders are striving to ensure that this is rectified.

Pupils receive feedback about how to improve their work more routinely and more consistently in line with the school's assessment policy. Some pupils report that this is helping them to understand how to improve their work more effectively. The impact of this feedback on pupils' overall longer-term progress is not yet evident, however. This is for two chief, linked, reasons: pupils are not routinely aware of how to improve their work over time; and teachers' feedback focuses on short-term targets too often which are not followed-up, meaning that issues identified in the past remain as issues. Where teachers' feedback is having a good impact, pupils have opportunities to revisit their work to make improvements, reflect on what they are aiming for in the future and are given the right challenges and support to achieve these targets. This is working particularly well in some departments, for example mathematics and art.

Teaching in the sixth form remains strong. Teachers assess students' work regularly which enables students to make the necessary improvements. Students know their target grades and are ambitious to achieve and exceed these. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to challenge students well. Students with whom inspectors spoke commented that they recognise that teachers go the extra mile to support their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders and teachers have made concerted efforts to improve behaviour around the school. Consequently, pupils' behaviour moving between lessons is largely very orderly. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and instances of low-level disruption are reducing. Pupils are smartly dressed and usually take pride in their work, although the presentation of some pupils' work remains less than good. Parents recognise the school's effective work to improve standards of pupils' behaviour.

Despite improvements to pupils' attendance overall, disadvantaged pupils are still absent too often. For example, school records show that disadvantaged pupils' attendance in Years 10 and 11 since September this year is much lower than for other pupils. However, the proportion of these pupils who are persistently absent is reducing. This is because leaders' work to improve attendance is intensifying, including the attendance officer's assiduous monitoring of pupils' absence and

pastoral leaders' efforts to make full attendance a priority for pupils and their parents.

Safeguarding remains effective and the school continues to work well with a range of agencies and partners to ensure pupils' safety. The school supports pupils' social and emotional welfare well, especially those pupils who are most vulnerable. Parents feel that their children are safe and that pupils are taught frequently about relevant issues. Pupils know who to go to if they have a problem and are confident that they will be listened to.

Outcomes for pupils

Overall, pupils achieved better GCSE results in 2016 than in 2015. Pupils made more progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. The most able pupils made particularly strong progress. Standards in the sixth form have improved and outcomes remain good. Students in the sixth form make strong progress over two years, but their progress is faster in Year 13 than in Year 12. This is an issue that leaders have identified and are addressing.

While pupils' GCSE outcomes are moving in the right direction, there is still a long way to go. Outcomes in English remain weak at the end of key stage 4 and current Year 11 pupils have a substantial amount of catching-up to do if they are to make the progress they should by next summer. Although pupils achieved more in GCSE mathematics in 2016, Year 11 pupils are currently not on track to repeat this. Senior and subject leaders understand the size of this challenge and know they need to take urgent steps to address it.

Disadvantaged pupils achieved marginally better in their GCSEs in 2016, but their outcomes were nowhere near good enough. There are early signs in some other year groups that their achievement is beginning to improve. For example, their progress in subjects such as mathematics, information technology, religious education, art and dance is largely improving. Importantly, they are achieving better in English during key stage 3. However, overall it remains a very mixed picture with no compelling evidence that their achievement is improving in a decisive way.

The most able pupils are responding well to more challenging work when it is offered. Lower-ability pupils are generally making sound progress. Boys are beginning to do better when compared with girls, although this remains an issue in a range of subjects and year groups. In particular, disadvantaged boys' achievement is not improving at the same rate as disadvantaged girls' achievement. In English, boys are beginning to engage more, work harder and therefore make better progress. This is partly because teachers now require pupils to work in more depth, using more challenging texts. Interestingly, this has been noticed by parents: one parent spoken to by inspectors said of her son that, 'English is now the only subject he talks about'; another commented of her son that, 'I know he is being stretched more in English because there are higher expectations now.' This is

indicative of the way in which the English department is rising to meet its current challenges.

External support

The school has ceased to work with the independent consultant it was working with at the time of the first monitoring inspection. The adviser from the Department for Education who had visited the school before the first monitoring inspection has not done so since. Instead, leaders have been working with an adviser from the RSC's office who has been supporting the school's transition to the River Learning Trust. This has been effective, although it has taken a relatively long time to get to the current stage of progress.

Leaders have made good use of two further sources of external support. The CEO of River Learning Trust has visited the school twice since September 2016. His primary focus has been to support leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching. He has already formed an accurate and sharp picture of the school, including what needs to improve next and at what rate. This work has dovetailed well with other support from a headteacher from a nearby outstanding school, brokered through the Oxford Teaching Schools Alliance. She has particular expertise and a proven track record in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. She has provided leaders with useful support for this aspect, among others, rightly urging them to approach it with renewed vigour.