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Dear Mr Sanders

Special measures monitoring inspection of Grafham Grange School

Following my visit to your school on 7 March 2017, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 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 may not 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 Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement by ensuring that:
 - teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - teachers can access opportunities to learn from best practice from within the school and elsewhere
 - teachers' development needs are identified properly so that bespoke training helps them to improve their practice
 - teachers learn how to incorporate pupils' health and education plans effectively into their planning.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring that:
 - the behaviour management policy is re-visited and adjusted to reflect an appropriate emphasis on the role of teachers and other adults in helping pupils to learn
 - strategies are developed to support and encourage better attendance and reduce the need for exclusion and other sanctions.
- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - fragile, temporary or short-term leadership roles are immediately addressed and leadership accountabilities are known to all
 - the day-to-day running of the school is identified and made clear to all
 - an external review of governance is undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved
 - safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully reviewed and all shortcomings identified within this inspection are rectified.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 7 March 2017

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, governors and a group of pupils.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection visit, a new chair of governors has been appointed. The speech and language therapist has left the school to take up a new post. At the time of this monitoring inspection a proposal to take over the Radius Trust group of schools has been received from the Aurora Group PLC and the relevant legal procedures have been initiated.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders have built upon the growing strengths identified at the previous monitoring inspection visit. The headteacher now has a secure team of leaders around him who are loyal and committed to the pupils and to school improvement. The headteacher's thoughtful and modestly collegiate approach to leading others has led to a secure and happier school.

Understandably, leaders and governors are completely focused on ensuring that the school is able to come out of special measures. The headteacher has ensured that any guidance from monitoring visits and external support is methodically considered and acted upon. Plans for improving the school are updated and reviewed regularly in order to push for further progress.

The leader responsible for overseeing teaching, learning and assessment has responded promptly to the findings from the previous monitoring inspection visit. Her regular monitoring of teachers' work is now more focused on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. She has ensured that staff have opportunities to improve their teaching through sharing of good practice and regular discussion about strategies that work. As a result, more staff are talking about pupils' learning and progress than just how to manage their behaviour.

School leaders have rightly recognised that some teachers are not confident enough about tracking pupils' progress closely from their starting points and using this information to plan appropriately challenging tasks. As at the time of the last inspection, there is some remaining uncertainty and inconsistency around how pupils' targets are set and whether these are reliable or realistic. Wisely, leaders have put in place a useful programme designed to help teachers arrive at accurate assessments of pupils' work and gain an up-to-date understanding of the new GCSE requirements. However, this work is at an early stage of development and is not yet

making an impact on pupils' progress.

At the last inspection visit, when the long-awaited review of governance had only just taken place, governors had not had enough time to act upon its recommendations. Governors have now made some sensible changes to their ways of working and are already demonstrating greater accountability. The new chair of governors has grasped the opportunity to make a difference with impressive energy and determination. Governors now have defined roles and responsibilities. They have a much better first-hand knowledge of teaching and learning in the school and have built up very positive relationships with staff. Minutes from the most recent meeting demonstrate a level of challenge and quality of questions that had not been evident previously. Nevertheless, it is essential that governance is seen to have even more impact on the school by the time of the next inspection.

At the previous monitoring inspection, Her Majesty's Inspector noted that arrangements for managing staff's performance, setting them targets and providing suitable training were at a very early stage. It is encouraging to see that all staff now have targets based on the school's key priorities and that some work has been done to determine the type of training and support staff need. Staff benefit from in-house training and specific guidance from senior leaders. However, there has not been sufficient time as yet to see the impact of performance management and training on the work of teachers and, more importantly, outcomes for pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching, learning and assessment are improving at a steady rate. There is no doubt that pupils are keen to learn: they ask and answer questions with enthusiasm; they concentrate well and listen to their teachers. School leaders rightly identify that teachers' subject knowledge, their planning and pupils' interest in learning are now much stronger.

Teachers use pupils' personal learning plans well when designing sequences of lessons. Staff are more confident about introducing intensive theory sessions in practical subjects such as physical education and design and technology. In these sessions pupils now respond well even though they sometimes find it hard to remember key concepts. At the same time, teachers are also growing more confident when planning practical sessions, for example in science. As at the previous monitoring inspection, pupils are clearly enjoying their science lessons. They appreciate the opportunity to take part in practical experiments, albeit at a fairly low level at this stage. The resources and the standard of work produced in science have improved since the last inspection. Pupils are motivated by more attractively presented materials. They are also challenged to record their findings and scientific thinking in more detail.

Teachers draw upon real-life examples to help put difficult concepts and ideas in context for pupils who may have gaps in their learning and experience. Teachers

are typically flexible. They respond naturally and often with warm humour to pupils' impulsive questions and comments, while gently getting them back to the topic. In general, it is heartening to see how the pupils are taking more pride in their own progress. However, many pupils worry about examinations and the school is rightly working to support those who may not achieve their potential because of their anxiety.

Nevertheless, there are aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that are not consistently strong enough and in some subjects the standard of work expected is still too low. The school has a policy for feeding back to pupils, but this is not followed consistently. In English, art and physical education, pupils know exactly what they are heading for, what they are doing well and how to improve. In other subjects, it is not as clear to pupils what the long-term aim is and where their work fits in to the bigger picture.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Standards of behaviour are stable in the school. Pupils are generally respectful to each other and to staff. Relationships are strong and genuine. Staff manage challenging situations calmly and are much more confident about using de-escalation strategies when emotions run high. Senior leaders who oversee pupils' behaviour have developed an effective system to record and analyse patterns of pupils' behaviour and their trigger points. Leaders review their work to support pupils' behaviour regularly and after any serious incident. They are rightly aware that there are often additional challenges when new pupils are admitted to the school and as existing pupils grow up and change. Leaders make sure that staff receive updated training in managing behaviour and supporting pupils to regulate their own emotions more successfully.

School leaders' understanding of each pupil is thorough, which contributes to overall safety and well-being. The leader responsible for safeguarding also has a comprehensive knowledge of how other agencies work to support and protect children. She has built up excellent relationships with social care teams in the different local authorities who place children at the school. The headteacher and governors are wisely ensuring that the current safeguarding leader's expertise is shared and distributed among other staff. In this way, more than one person can take responsibility for pupils' safety and work alongside the multi-disciplinary teams.

Leaders and governors have analysed and reviewed the recent drops in attendance for a few pupils and the relative increase in incidents leading to physical intervention or exclusion. They have correctly identified that some patterns of behaviour are as a result of new admissions and pupils on trial periods in the school. Every chance is given to pupils to settle in and conform to the school's expectations, especially for those pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. However, the school is rightly not prepared to compromise other pupils' and staff's safety when all strategies have been tried and failed.

Pupils' views about the school are consistently positive about how much the school has improved. Their comments match what parents and pupils have previously told Her Majesty's Inspector. New pupils to the school feel welcomed. Pupils say that they see the school as a family and that they feel safe and cared-for. They appreciate the advice and guidance they are given about their next steps and careers choices. Some pupils are keen to stay on in the school post-16.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders have introduced a more precise tracking system to enable regular assessments of pupils' progress throughout the term, but this is not yet fully established with all staff.

In English, art and physical education, assessment and target-setting are accurate and most pupils are making better progress than they were previously. During this monitoring inspection, Her Majesty's Inspector saw some excellent art work produced by pupils getting ready for their GCSE examinations. It is also encouraging to see pupils producing more extended and accurate writing in subjects other than English. Pupils are certainly benefiting from the opportunity to study new subjects such as history and geography. Such study helps pupils to look outwards and understand the world around them.

It is also pleasing to hear that pupils are making the most of the daily reading sessions, choosing from an appealing and regularly updated selection of books. Staff sensibly encourage a mixture of reading for pleasure and background reading to support a pupil's interest or a lesson topic. As a result, pupils are making better progress with their basic literacy.

Pupils are now completing more challenging and varied topics in mathematics, although in a few cases their work is not as well-presented or accurate as it could be.

External support

The school continues to make effective use of a school improvement partner who has supported leaders and governors with developing assessment and tracking of pupils' progress.