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Mr M Blencowe
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Dear Mr Blencowe

Implementation of Northfield School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr E Craven HMI to your school on 13 and 14 June 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Oxfordshire. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF NORTHFIELD SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit ten lessons or parts of lessons, one registration session, the breakfast club and a meeting of the school council were inspected. A visit was undertaken to the school's alternative provision unit (APU). Meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteachers, the community psychiatric nurse, the chair of governors and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the deputy headteachers, the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the LEA.

The school has received resignations from three teachers. An experienced teacher of English has been appointed to the position of English co-ordinator for September 2005 and the school has placed a national advertisement for two other teachers. The school has suitable contingency arrangements, should the remaining appointments not be made for the start of the next school year. The school has established a contract with the local primary care trust for a dedicated community psychiatric nurse to be based at the school for seven sessions each week. The Year 11 pupils were on examination study leave at the time of the visit.

The number of pupils who took the end-of Key Stage 3 national tests this term was the highest ever. Twelve pupils took the tests and the school predicts that two will achieve the nationally expected Level 5 in English and mathematics. Other pupils are expected to achieve lesser grades, ranging from those below the level of the test to Level 4 in science and from Level 2 to Level 4 in English and mathematics. Four pupils have taken GCSE English, mathematics and science examinations this term, with expected grades ranging from C to F.

The pupils' learning was good in three lessons, satisfactory in five, and unsatisfactory in two. The staff are encouraging the pupils to undertake self-assessment at the end of lessons; this is helping the pupils to value their learning. In lessons where learning was good the pupils built on their prior knowledge effectively. In a Key Stage 3 mathematics lesson the pupils learned to use their knowledge of grid coordinates to reflect a shape across its line of symmetry. In a Key Stage 3 cookery lesson the pupils worked independently and with confidence. They used implements with good control and paid due attention to health and safety. One pupil explained that, following a lesson where he learned to cook a shepherd's pie, he had successfully made this at home for his family. In one of the lessons where learning was unsatisfactory this was because the

conditions for learning were significantly disturbed by some of the pupils who were intent on disrupting the lesson. They chattered to each other while the teacher was talking and a few shouted out answers; some were rude in their responses. One of the pupils walked out of the lesson before it had finished. In another lesson the pupil made insufficient progress as the work was too easy for him; the lack of assessment information resulted in work not being suitably matched to his needs.

The quality of teaching was good in three lessons, satisfactory in six, and unsatisfactory in one. Regular reference was made in lesson plans to the additional support some pupils would require; this was most often provided by the teaching assistants. Teachers have received support from the LEA's consultants in making assessments of the pupils' performance in the National Curriculum subjects. However, this information was not used sufficiently in planning work to match the needs and abilities of individual and small groups of pupils. In lessons where teaching was good the most positive feature was the setting of work that was practical, meaningful and relevant to the pupils. In a cookery lesson the pupils understood clearly what was required of them and they appreciated how they could apply the skills being learned to situations outside of school; they thoroughly enjoyed their learning. In an English lesson at Key Stage 3 the teacher had high expectations for good behaviour, co-operation and industry, to which the pupils responded well. She usefully checked on their understanding and learning during the lesson and there was good emphasis on key words. Praise was used meaningfully in good lessons. In the lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory it was because the pupils found the topic uninteresting; this promoted disruptive behaviour which, in turn, was not well managed by the teacher.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good in four lessons, satisfactory in five, and unsatisfactory in one. This represents an improvement since the last visit. Most of the pupils have become more responsive to staff's requests and are showing respect. Invariably, staff demonstrate appropriate care and respect to the pupils. Where the behaviour and attitudes were good the pupils were motivated by the activities and they tackled their work diligently. In a Key Stage 3 music lesson two pupils were being taught guitar chords. Despite their eagerness to strum the guitars and practise their chords; they listened and responded readily when the teacher stopped them practising while she made teaching points. In another lesson, where the pupils' behaviour was good overall, the teaching assistant had cause to remind a pupil about the potential loss of points for a minor disengagement; he responded well and re-engaged with the task quickly. In the lesson where behaviour and attitudes were unsatisfactory, two Key Stage 4 pupils disregarded the staff at times and their disruptive behaviour impeded the learning of others; on one occasion they became catalysts for misbehaviour from the rest of the pupils. This was not managed with sufficient assertiveness; at times the teacher tried to continue teaching amid inattentiveness and even shouting from

some of the pupils. Overall, many of the pupils have inadequate listening skills; they do not show sufficient regard to others who are talking. The registration session observed dealt mainly with administrative arrangements and was not well used to further the pupils' personal, social and moral development. The behaviour around the school was generally good. Swearing was seldom heard. The school has been made more attractive with good quality displays and planters; these have been respected by the pupils and remain undamaged.

The pupils' attendance rate for the autumn and spring terms 2004-05 was unsatisfactory at 76.6 per cent. The very poor attendance of a few disaffected older pupils, based mainly at the APU, is a cause for concern. The need to use fixed-term exclusion as a sanction has reduced, as has the number of incidents requiring physical restraint; there have been none in the last two months.

The school is suitably prepared for the national requirements in remodelling the workforce in September 2005; four teaching assistants have been promoted as part of these arrangements. The deputy headteachers' job descriptions have been evaluated in an additional school review undertaken by the LEA; helpful points for action have been determined. The analyses of attendance and behaviour data continue to be good. The school has helpfully completed a self-evaluation form using the Ofsted model and guidance. The curriculum offer for cookery has been greatly enhanced by the refurbishment of the cookery room; this is an attractive and well-resourced provision. A range of extracurricular activities has been introduced including, competitive sporting events and residential trips for Year 7 and those pupils undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

The governing body has been hindered by the family illness of one parent governor, the resignation of one and the non-attendance of another. Nevertheless, most of the other governors have made regular visits to the school and have a good appreciation of developments in their areas of designated responsibility. The minutes of the governing body meetings are suitably detailed and the new clerking arrangements are working effectively.

As part of an additional school review, the LEA has evaluated the work of subject co-ordinators. This was a thorough exercise and has resulted in helpful points for development for each co-ordinator, which are being used as a basis for their subject action plans. There has been valuable support provided by a range of the LEA's advisers and consultants, including much-appreciated support from the behaviour and attendance consultant and the adviser for special educational needs. The school reports that the value of in-service training from the LEA has been mixed, with a few sessions lacking pertinence to the school's pupil population.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: review, in conjunction with the local education authority, the provision that is made available to the pupils who are currently not attending

The pupils who are not in receipt of full-time education are well known to the school; their whereabouts is clearly documented. Some of these pupils are significantly disengaged from the school, with some involved with the criminal justice system; others are in receipt of mental health support. The senior managers meet fortnightly with the education social worker to conduct case reviews of these pupils; at these meetings the plans for increasing their attendance are monitored. Encouragingly, the attendance of a few Year 10 pupils placed at the APU has recently increased to four days a week. The deputy headteacher responsible for the APU is leading a review of the curriculum for the most challenging pupils and some more relevant and interesting activities have been added to the curriculum. The school is trying earnestly, with modest success, to identify suitable work-experience placements for the pupils placed at the APU.

Progress has been reasonable.

2: improve the management of behaviour of a number of pupils by consistent use of the school behaviour policy

The pupils' behaviour has improved. Staff are generally applying the system of rewards and sanctions consistently. The 'pennies for points' system has become embedded in practice and is generally valued by the pupils. Suitably, the school has increased the challenge for pupils to earn points; the thresholds for credits have been raised. Senior staff have also combined the use of points and sanctions effectively and are challenging staff with data that shows where the issuing of points and sanctions have been inequitable. The pupils understand that incidents of poor behaviour mean loss of points. Many of the locks on internal doors have been removed since the last visit; this is a good measure of the improving ethos in the school. The appointment of a community psychiatric nurse to the school is a promising development and there are indications that her casework and her co-ordination of the agencies involved with the school are proving beneficial.

Progress has been good.

3. raise the quality of teaching in English for pupils between the ages of 14 and 16 and in science for all pupils

The English and science co-ordinators are leaving the school at the end of term. However, there will be staff leading these subjects from the start of the new school

year. There has been substantial support from the LEA's consultants for the co-ordinators of English and science and for other staff. This has included consultations, reviews of coursework, lesson observations and coaching. Helpfully, the LEA's next additional school review in June 2005 will concentrate on English and science. The resources for science have been improved and smaller teaching groups have been established for practical subjects. The use of assessment information is not sufficiently informing the planning of lessons.

Progress has been reasonable.

4. further develop management systems, particularly the links between the school improvement plan, the use of the budget and raising standards, and develop the role of the governing body in monitoring the work of the school

The senior leadership team and core curriculum co-ordinators have received training in monitoring teaching and learning. A common format is used to record observations; however, teachers receive only oral feedback following monitoring observations. A coaching model is being established to enable the core subject co-ordinators to have more influence around the school. The staff and governors recently held a joint-evaluation meeting which identified and celebrated the progress made by the school and usefully enabled staff to question the senior managers about aspects of the school in open debate. The governors have a good system for recording the outcomes of their visits to the school. There is regular communication between the headteacher and chair of governors, who has a good view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher, aided by the LEA, has prepared a useful outline school improvement plan.

Progress has been reasonable.

5. ensure the teaching of religious education for all pupils and the statutory curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 16

This area for improvement has been fully addressed.

6. ensure that headteacher performance management takes place

This area for improvement has been fully addressed.

7. ensure that the governors' annual report to parents includes all required information

The governors have agreed their report to parents and all statutory requirements have been accommodated.

Progress has been good.