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Ms K Curtis  
Headteacher  
Wheatley Park School  
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Dear Ms Curtis

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Wheatley Park School

Following my visit with Charlotte Evers, additional inspector, and Thomas Gibson, additional inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 February 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm

Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Wheatley Park School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 February 2010

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of students, three governors including the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

## Context

Since the previous inspection, an acting assistant headteacher has been made permanent assistant headteacher. There have been two temporary appointments to the senior team to cover for a senior leader on maternity leave.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Actions taken by the school to tackle the underachievement evident at the time of the last inspection are slowly beginning to have a positive effect, though learning and progress remains inconsistent. Inspectors observed good progress being made in history, geography, French, English, mathematics, science and drama. Progress was slower in other lessons observed. The school's new tracking and assessment procedures indicate that despite continued underachievement in relation to the groups identified in the previous inspection, improvements have been made to boost the rate of progress these students make. School data indicate that more students in Key Stage 4 are on track to achieve their GCSE targets than at this time last year. A challenging target has been set for Year 10 students, which is higher than that for current Year 11 students, and teachers feel confident that it can be achieved. In the sixth form, the students studying for GCSE qualifications are making better progress than the previous cohort. The school's predictions for this group indicate better attainment in the 2010 examinations.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the rate of progress made by students taking GCSE courses in the sixth form and in other less well performing groups in the main school  
– *satisfactory*

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Since September 2009, the school has introduced a number of initiatives to improve behaviour in lessons and around the school. These are having a positive impact leading to fewer students being sent out of lessons and a marked reduction in exclusions. The school has managed to identify a core group of students who



regularly behave poorly and has enhanced its monitoring, tracking and support of these students to reduce the number of serious disruptive incidents in lessons. Students said that the new behaviour management procedures worked in more classes than at the time of the previous inspection, but not in all. They said that teachers were not applying them consistently across the school and some lessons were still disrupted. Nevertheless, in a survey of parents' views undertaken in January 2010, 87% of respondents agreed behaviour rules and expectations are clear and 91% agreed that their child is happy at school. The recording and logging of all incidents is clear and detailed and follow-up information indicates that the school is beginning to address the problems of poor behaviour more effectively. The school deals well with the very few recorded racist incidents.

Students continue to feel safe at school and their adoption of healthy lifestyles remains exemplary. Students are keen to be involved in the life of the school community and are involved in a number of local community projects. Attendance is above average. Students said they had a range of opportunities in different lessons to explore the values, beliefs and feelings of those who live in different societies and communities. This leads to greater understanding and acceptance of diversity. The school's specialism has encouraged all students to be involved in artistic, sporting and cultural events which are well attended and contribute effectively to school and community cohesion.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate the incidence of disruptions to learning by managing more effectively the behaviour of students who are not engaged –  
*satisfactory*

The effectiveness of provision

There are early indications that more rigorous monitoring of lessons is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. None of these were inadequate and eight were good or better in terms of the learning and progress that students made. The work of the leaders for teaching and learning, student achievement, and assessment, has begun to focus much more rigorously and effectively on enabling heads of faculty to address issues of weaker teaching within their areas. New data processes for tracking student attainment and progress provide teachers with good tools for informing them about where improvements still need to be made to ensure all students achieve as well as they should. As a consequence, subject departments have better data to ensure that their self-evaluations are accurate and focus on key areas for improvement. This work is embryonic and not effectively embedded across the school. It is having most positive impact in Year 11, but is not yet fully introduced to Key Stage 3. Not all teachers fully understand how to interrogate the assessment information so as to improve learning and progress for all students in their classes. This explains the apparent paradox of more lessons being judged good or better but student achievement over



time and in examinations remaining below expectations. Where teachers have used the new data to create lesson activities that meet the needs of all groups of students, progress is faster and attainment is above average. This good practice has not been shared effectively with all teachers. As a consequence, lesson planning too often describes what students will do, and not enough on what, and how, they are expected to learn. The quality of marking is inconsistent, though again there are examples of very good practice which could be shared.

The school is exploring ways of enhancing the curriculum in the sixth form for those students for whom A-level courses are not suitable. The curriculum in the rest of the school effectively meets the needs of students. Care, guidance and support are now better than at the time of the previous inspection because the shortcomings in relation to safeguarding have been addressed.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that teaching meets the needs of all students and that lessons are consistently challenging with sharply focused objectives for learning – *satisfactory*

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the inspection in September, school leaders, working in conjunction with the local authority, the school improvement partner and a temporary consultant headteacher, have worked with increasing determination to address the key issues for improvement. The school and department self-evaluation and action plans all focus on making improvements to address the key weaknesses. There have been barriers to making swift progress, such as the need to restructure the senior leadership team. New leaders have to work their way into their new roles at the same time as addressing some of the key issues for improvement left by the previous inspections. They are meeting these challenges with enthusiasm and hard work.

Additional leadership support, appointed very recently on a temporary basis until the end of the academic year, has only just begun to make its contribution to school improvement. The school agrees that as a consequence, a number of urgent improvements will not be addressed fully until all the leadership team is engaged on their respective tasks. The school has recently introduced more rigorous systems to collect and analyse information on students' progress and this has enabled it to see where underachievement exists and to intervene to support identified students appropriately. Not all teachers use this information to support their students as effectively as possible. However, faculty and middle leaders are becoming increasingly confident at using such information to refine their intervention strategies and so improve achievement. Departmental self-evaluations indicate that assessment information enables teachers to set more challenging targets for students, but the school acknowledges that there is some way to go before such



procedures are embedded securely across the school. However, satisfactory progress has been made in this direction. The school action plan is sound and the proposed actions and timescales are specific with responsibilities clearly indicated. The governing body reacted quickly and positively to ensure that statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding and equalities were met. Progress in relation to safeguarding has been good and that in relation to equalities has been satisfactory. Governors now challenge the school more robustly about how well it has made progress towards achieving its targets. The new head of sixth form is beginning to provide effective leadership and is addressing the issues relating to underachievement identified in the last inspection. The school continues to promote community cohesion well.

The school's specialist status in media arts continues to have a positive impact on curriculum provision and especially in relation to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The new lead for media arts recognises that the specialist subjects can make further contributions to general school improvement by sharing good practice. Specialist subjects are on track to achieve their targets this year.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure the school meets statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding and equality – *satisfactory*

External support

The school is working productively with a range of partners to improve outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning. Local authority consultants are beginning to support the school to refine strategies and initiatives so that school improvement gathers pace. The local authority statement of action, though good, needs to be monitored carefully so that planned improvements are in place at the earliest opportunity. Local Authority discussions with the school need to lead to more specific actions to guide improvements. The school improvement partner is beginning to help the school sharpen its analysis of results. The timescale set for the school to no longer require special measures is realistic but this will only occur when the school can demonstrate robustly its own capacity to sustain better provision and outcomes.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the impact of teaching and learning on student progress throughout the school by:
  - ensuring all teachers use data to create lesson activities which meet the needs of all groups of students
  - improving lesson planning so it focuses more tightly on what and how students will learn.

