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Mrs Sue Child
The Headteacher
Oakwood School
Balcombe Road
Horley
Surrey
RH6 9AE

Dear Mrs Child

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakwood School

Following my visit with Linda McGill HMI and Christopher Grove and Heidi Boreham, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 9 and 10 November 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 not 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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2011

- Build on recent improvements in teaching so that a consistently higher proportion of teaching is good or better and so raise achievement by:
 - ensuring that teaching consistently supports and challenges all students, particularly for those who have the potential to reach the highest grades in examinations
 - involving all students more actively in their lessons through whole-class, individual and group work to foster independent and cooperative learning
 - giving students greater opportunities to develop, apply and reinforce their learning across subjects
 - checking the understanding and progress of all students in lessons and giving clear written feedback to ensure they all know about how to improve and so move up to the next level in each subject.
- Ensure students feel safe and improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning across the school by:
 - providing and clearly communicating a code of conduct for behaviour
 - training staff so they effectively and consistently apply the behaviour policy
 - developing students' understanding of how to keep safe and their confidence that any concerns will be heard and effectively acted upon
 - involving all students in school decision making – giving students more opportunities to take on roles of responsibility.
- Develop the home-school learning partnership by improving the effectiveness of communication systems and involving parents and carers more in school life.
- Develop senior and middle leaders so they take a more evaluative and strategic approach to their roles in order to maximize their impact on outcomes for students, in particular on achievement, behaviour and staying safe.

Special measures: monitoring of Oakwood School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 November 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 25 parts of lessons. They scrutinised documents, including the school's self-evaluation documentation and attainment data, and met with the headteacher, members of staff, groups of pupils, parents, two members of the governing body, the Principal Secondary Consultant from the local authority and the school improvement consultant.

Context

A school improvement consultant, provided by the local authority, spends two days per week at the school. One of the three deputy headteachers has left the school having gained promotion elsewhere, and one position at senior level is currently held by an acting post holder. The tutoring system, previously managed by heads of house, no longer operates and heads of year are now responsible for the performance and well-being of each year group.

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

GCSE results have been made available since the previous section 5 inspection and indicate an improvement in the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. The school is awaiting the outcome of a complete remark of GCSE English higher level papers. Progress seen in lessons during the inspection was broadly satisfactory including for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language and those known to be eligible for free school meals. Students enjoy and achieve particularly well in some of the humanities subjects.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

There is evidence that behaviour is improving. Behaviour seen during this inspection was variable but often good. There were a few instances where students' low-level disruptive behaviour interfered with learning. There was a strong correlation between the quality of teaching and the behaviour observed in lessons. In the best lessons, where students' interest and enthusiasm are captured, students work very well, apply themselves to the task in hand and make good progress. In a few instances, students' behaviour was better, despite the quality of teaching being less effective.

Some students confirmed they had seen improvements in behaviour recently, and that incidents of bullying were reducing. Others were not so convinced, and there remain aspects of behaviour that concern them. Younger students reported incidents of name calling as well as unsafe behaviour when students use the corridors and

stairs. The school's code of conduct is being applied more consistently with rewards and sanctions being implemented more regularly. This is showing some impact in that the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced and the number of students referred to internal seclusion has also fallen.

Students' opinions and ideas have been sought on a number of aspects of school life. The reorganisation of tutor groups has been helpful and time has been used in tutor sessions to discuss some important issues which directly affect students. These have included discussing the components of a good lesson, which lunchtime activities they would like to see and how to identify bullying, empathise with the victim and get the matter resolved. Students have been given opportunities to express their views on the school's website. The student council has met, but not many students were able to say if the council had any influence or impact on making changes.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- ensure students feel safe and improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning across the school – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors carried out a number of lesson observations with members of the senior leadership team and in these lessons, agreed with their judgements. In the better lessons observed, teachers made more effective use of resources and delivered the lessons with a pace which motivated and engaged students. Opportunities were provided for students to work both independently and collaboratively. Teachers planned these lessons carefully, making effective use of available information on students' progress, and built a variety of activities into the lesson to cater for the learning needs of all students. However, in some lessons, teachers do not consistently use assessment information effectively enough to plan work or pitch their teaching to meet the needs and abilities of individual students. As a result, instead of providing a range of activities of varying difficulty to meet each student's individual needs, all do the same work. Scrutiny of lesson planning shows some teachers remain confused about the connection between different learning outcomes and associated teaching activities. The school is working more effectively to prepare students in Year 11 for their examinations by providing starter activities in lessons to resemble examination-type questions.

Schemes of work were not scrutinised during this inspection but are being reviewed by middle leaders to track the delivery of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. This process is due to be informed by a literacy audit conducted by a consultant from the local authority.

The quality of written feedback in teachers' marking is one of the determining factors affecting the rate of students' progress. Where feedback from teachers is constructive and clearly identifies ways in which students can progress to the next level, students are more aspirational because they know what they can achieve and

how to get there. Not all teachers' marking has yet reached this level of detail. Leaders and managers have included the marking of students' work in the monitoring programme, and a recent review concentrated on the quality of assessment in Years 7 and 10. Lesson plans are structured in such a way that teachers are expected to check for students' understanding at various points during the lesson. In more successful lessons, teachers and teaching assistants insist that students justify their answers and use a variety of more effective strategies to check that all students have understood what is being taught before moving on to the next stage of the lesson.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- build on recent improvements in teaching so that a consistently higher proportion of teaching is good or better and so raise achievement – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Actions identified in the school's improvement plans indicate that there are increasing opportunities provided to develop the roles of middle leaders. The school's strategic yearly calendar clearly identifies systems and timescales for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing aspects of the school's work. There are frequent opportunities to make staff accountable through line management meetings, identifying issues for discussion with senior and middle leaders, collection of relevant performance data and optional training for post holders. Lines of communication are clearer and a more evaluative approach is evident. Middle leaders value the more strategic approach they are expected to adopt and say they are starting to feel more empowered by their line managers. For example, heads of faculty have produced a helpful document to record evidence from conducting 'learning walks' and heads of year benefit from visiting form tutor time to monitor the activities taking place.

Senior leaders have guided a number of initiatives planned to impact positively on improving students' outcomes, but many are too recent to have taken full effect. Senior leaders recognise, as a next step, the importance of prioritising actions to remedy weaknesses and to accelerate the pace of improvement. Members of the governing body have recently been updated on safeguarding procedures and ensure that safeguarding routines are followed rigorously.

Parents and carers have responded positively to the school's efforts to involve them more actively in their child's educational development. Improved systems of communication, clearly outlined in parent communication cards, enable parents and carers to easily access form tutors, subject teachers and leaders and managers through the use of email or prompt appointments. The launch of 'Every day is an open day' facilitates meetings with senior staff and opportunities to be taken on a tour of the school. Form tutors are instrumental in making contact with parents and carers who are harder to reach and parental concerns are acted upon promptly. As a result, the proportion of parental or carer concerns and complaints has decreased due to more effective communication.

The school's website has recently been made more parent and carer friendly and now enables them to gain information on all aspects of school life and educational issues. For example, links to school policies, forthcoming events and information on rewards earned by students are all easily accessible. The website is also more informative on issues experienced by young people including bullying, drug abuse and cyber bullying and offers parents and carers valuable information on these areas of concern. The parent forum is effective in evaluating school initiatives, allowing parents and carers to express their views and recommending improvements. The school acts promptly on parental or carer suggestions and recommendations, as for example providing a link to the virtual learning environment to see homework set by individual subject, combined with guidance for students and parents on how to complete the assignments.

Members of the governing body engage with parents and carers at the well-attended parents' consultation or year group evenings. They also make follow-up calls to parents and carers to ascertain whether they are happy with actions taken by the school to resolve issues they have raised.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- develop the home-school learning partnership by improving the effectiveness of communication systems and involving parents and carers more in school life – good
- develop senior and middle leaders so they take a more evaluative and strategic approach to their roles in order to maximise their impact on all outcomes for students, in particular on achievement, behaviour and staying safe – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose. The plan sets out actions to address the key areas for improvement within an ambitious timescale and progress is monitored regularly. Support provided through the local authority has been extensive through the provision of an associate headteacher and a school improvement consultant, currently in school two days per week. The school appreciates the local authority's support and speaks positively of the impact of the numerous visits by specialist consultants.