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17 September 2014

Mr Alex Wills  
The Headteacher  
Ferndown Upper School  
Cherry Grove  
Ferndown  
Dorset  
BH22 9EY

Dear Mr Wills

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Ferndown Upper School**

Following my visit to your school on Tuesday 16 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you, your senior staff and members of the governing body made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Dorset and The Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

James Sage  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching across all subjects, especially in English, so that it is consistently good by:
  - ensuring teachers use the information about how well students are doing to plan lessons that help all students learn more, especially the most and least able
  - making sure that the work set for students is always set at the right level so that all students, including those who are disabled and those with special educational needs, achieve as well as they can
  - ensuring that activities and approaches used in lessons capture students' interests and help them become more involved in their learning and think for themselves
  - ensuring that marking gives students clear and detailed feedback on how well they are doing, and information about how to improve their work, reach their targets and understand examination requirements
  - improving the consistency in performance in the sixth form by eradicating the variances of teaching between AS and A2 examination courses.
- Raise attainment and accelerate progress for all groups of students, especially boys, the most-able, students who are eligible for the pupil premium, disabled students and those who have special educational needs, across a range of subjects, especially in English, by:
  - ensuring the gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students across the school are narrowed so that they all achieve well
  - ensuring that students who are persistently absent achieve better examination results by attending more regularly and that strategies are in place to ensure they catch up
  - reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions so that all students are able to achieve their potential by being in school and attending lessons.
- Ensure leaders and managers, including governors, secure more rapid improvements by:
  - increasing the pace with which changes are introduced to improve achievement and progress
  - ensuring there is greater consistency in the quality of teaching and marking across all subjects
  - developing the skills of governors so that they can check that leaders are bringing about necessary improvements
  - sharing more widely the good practice that currently exists in school.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.
- 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 governance may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on Tuesday 16 September 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other members and a representative of the local authority. The inspector also undertook a short tour of lessons with the headteacher. The focus of this one day visit was to undertake a detailed analysis of 2014 examination results and check progress against the key improvement points since the first monitoring visit in May 2014.

### **Context**

The extended senior leadership team has been strengthened by the addition of two further directors of learning. Heads of year now have a much more clearly defined role in monitoring students' progress and achievement. A significant number of teachers have left the school; all vacancies have been filled.

The number of students entering the school in Year 9 in September fell; this has resulted in a significant reduction in the school's budget. The number in the sixth form has grown, but the school will not see the financial benefits of this for another year. As a result of having surplus places, a significant number of students arrive during the school year in each year group.

The governing body is holding discussions about the school becoming a sponsored academy.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

While there has been improvement in some aspects of students' achievement and the quality of teaching, the pace of improvement up to the end of July was not rapid enough. The headteacher, senior and middle leaders and the governing body all know what needs to be done and have put in place appropriate strategies, but the actions taken have not yet had sufficient impact. A detailed and through analysis of achievement and attainment information means that senior leaders and teachers are fully aware of the performance of all groups of students and the individuals they teach. However, the school lacks a consistently rigorous and relentless focus on improving the achievement of those students who could, and should, do better, regardless of their background, ability or starting point.

Senior leaders and the governing body need to inject a greater sense of urgency to secure the further improvement required to ensure that the school becomes the good school it aspires to be. The governing body's procedures for monitoring the actions taken by leaders and managers are not robust enough. A lack of frequent milestones with challenging targets against each action means that governors' ability

to hold leaders to account for the progress being made is hampered. The governing body must focus on challenging the headteacher and senior leaders to secure the rapid improvements required and not be distracted in this by discussions about the future status of the school.

The recommended external reviews of governance and the use of the pupil premium have both been completed. The review of governance confirmed that the governing body has the skills and expertise necessary to provide the balance of support and challenge for the headteacher and other leaders. While the review of the use of the pupil premium confirmed that the school has the right strategies in place, they are yet to have sufficient impact. The gaps in the achievement of those students supported by the pupil premium and those who are not, while closing, are still too wide.

Most students enjoy coming to the school and have a great sense of loyalty to it. The school creates a strong sense of community and promotes the well-being of its students well. However, these good feelings have not been harnessed sufficiently to involve students in improving the school through adopting more positive attitudes to their learning. Students play a limited role in helping to clarify what good teaching and learning look like and in providing feedback on this to senior leaders.

The key areas requiring urgent attention are:

- further closing the gaps in achievement between those students supported by the pupil premium and those who are not, and between boys and girls, particularly in English
- ensuring that teaching sets higher levels of challenge for all students, both for their achievement and their attitudes to learning
- ensure that all teaching clearly identifies and focuses on those students who are falling behind so that they are able to catch up quickly
- ensuring that the more comprehensive approach now being taken to deal with students who enter the school with low levels in reading, writing and mathematics is made more effective by frequent monitoring of their progress
- making sure that the improved system for the marking of students' work, giving them feedback and ensuring they take the actions required to improve their work, is applied consistently and effectively by all teachers in all subjects.

In order to achieve these, school leaders and governors must ensure the monitoring of students' progress and achievement is more frequent and used precisely to improve the quality of teaching.

While the fall in students' achievement in Year 13 is a concern, improvements in achievement at the end of Year 12 indicate that some of the underlying weaknesses in teaching have been resolved. Effective steps have been taken to help students make better use of independent study time and to be better prepared for lessons. The Centre for Excellence in Industrial Liaison has excellent potential to bring work-

related learning into the curriculum and to provide suitable work experience for those students that need it. However, the significant variation in achievement across subjects has yet to be sufficiently reduced; this is, rightly, a priority for the sixth form leader. I recommend that the planned review of the sixth form provision, to ensure that it provides study programmes that meet the needs of all students and prepares them well for their next steps, is undertaken as a matter of urgency. This review must take account of the key findings and recommendations in the Ofsted report: *Transforming 16 to 19 education and training* (September 2014).

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The accurate identification of what is not good enough and putting in place appropriate strategies to secure the improvements required.
- The analysis of data to ensure that senior and middle leaders are clear about where achievement is not good enough.
- Making heads of year more clearly accountable for monitoring students' progress and managing the support and interventions required when students fall behind.
- The arrangements for holding subject leaders to account.
- The more comprehensive approach to tackling students' low levels of literacy and numeracy when students enter the school in Year 9.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Not making sure that all teachers fully understand what good and better teaching looks like.
- Teachers and students lack the sense of urgency required to make the necessary improvements quickly.

### **External support**

The local authority is being supportive and responds to requests for help from the school. However, it lacks the sense of urgency required to ensure that the school improves rapidly. Although it has been involved in several reviews of the school and senior leaders have found these helpful in confirming the key areas of improvement, the local authority has not set clear and challenging targets to help the school improve quickly enough. Local authority officers are supporting the school in trying to manage admissions more effectively.