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Dear Mr Sanders

Special measures monitoring inspection of Grafham Grange School

Following my visit to your school on 16 November 2016, 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 third 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 third monitoring inspection on 16 November 2016

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector met with senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils. She visited lessons to observe teaching and learning, accompanied by senior leaders. A sample of pupils' work in a range of subjects was scrutinised. The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including safeguarding and behaviour records, information about pupils' progress and documentation related to the work of governors. Her Majesty's Inspector had telephone conversations with four parents.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, one teacher has left the school. Two teaching assistants have joined the school and an experienced long-term supply teacher has been appointed to teach mathematics.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership across the school is stronger and more confident. The senior leaders responsible for overseeing the quality of teaching, pupils' progress, behaviour and safeguarding now work well together as a cohesive team. During the monitoring inspection, it was clearly evident that leaders are bringing the school together to make improvements. Senior leaders' positive outlook and efficiency are helping to maintain staff morale and resilience.

Senior leaders' oversight of pupils' safety and well-being is secure because there is clear communication between different areas of the school. The designated safeguarding leader has a strong working relationship with other agencies who protect children. It is also encouraging to see how closely the leader for safeguarding is working with the leader overseeing and tracking pupils' behaviour. As a result of this close teamwork, staff and leaders have developed a better understanding of the strong link between pupils' emotional health and their behaviour. Leaders have rightly identified that more work could be done to analyse patterns of behaviour and how these have an impact on pupils' progress in lessons.

Leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and learning as part of a structured programme and provide staff with useful feedback. There are more opportunities for teachers to share good practice and discuss effective teaching strategies at the weekly staff meetings. As a result, staff are learning from each other and teaching is improving.

Although standards of teaching, learning and behaviour have risen, teachers and leaders are not tracking pupils' day-to-day progress closely enough to set realistic and achievable targets. Leaders are understandably positive with pupils and encourage them to aim high and not to be discouraged if they have setbacks or find

things difficult. However, leaders and teachers are not making sure that pupils in every subject know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

The school's appraisal system continues to be underdeveloped. Leaders are still at the stage of checking what teachers are doing rather than deeply evaluating what pupils are learning. Senior leaders are not focusing enough on the impact better teaching is having on pupils' progress and teachers do not yet have formal targets that are based on the key priorities for improving the school. This is a missed opportunity to build upon staff's positive attitude and hard work in order to accelerate pupils' progress.

Following the previous monitoring inspection, the school has focused more closely on promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, pupils recently took responsibility for restoring the school's memorial garden as part of preparations for Remembrance Day. Pupils wrote thoughtful poems and participated in a commemorative ceremony to remember those who died or were injured in wars. They also took the opportunity to reflect on people loved and lost in their own lives. Pupils conducted themselves impeccably during this day and showed respect and consideration.

The reputation of the school is improving. Parents who spoke to the inspector are relieved about the impact the school is having on their sons. Parents can see that the school has improved and their trust and faith have been restored because of the school's good communication, approachable staff and individual attention. Parents of pupils new to the school are pleased with the welcome and the strong provision to manage their sons' needs. One parent said that she had 'fought for her son to come to Grafham Grange' and another said her son looked forward to coming to school and that she had seen a change in him at home.

At the previous monitoring inspection, Her Majesty's Inspector charged the school to arrange a review of governance without delay. The review has recently taken place, the draft findings of which are currently under consideration by the governing body. The review has identified appropriate recommendations for governors and the trust to consider, including making sure that lines of accountability between the trust and the governing body are clearly defined.

It is disappointing that the review of governance took place more than a year after the school was judged to require special measures and that governors have not yet acted upon the sensible recommendations from the review. At present they are not clear about what they will do differently, or what will be put in place to ensure that there are no mistakes that put the school at risk of decline again. Governors have wisely signed up for further training and support in their role. However, it is essential that governors and the Radius Trust respond promptly and decisively to the recommendations in the review in order to hold themselves firmly to account for their leadership.

On a more positive note, governors now have a much more detailed idea of what is happening in the school. They visit more often and school leaders provide them with honest and detailed evaluations of the improvements made, which provoke challenging questions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching continues to improve because it is based more directly on pupils' needs and ability. Pupils' personalised learning plans now form a firm foundation for teachers' planning and assessment. Teachers and leaders regularly review learning plans in order to make sure that pupils' targets are appropriate.

The speech and language therapy team are fully involved in teachers' planning and supporting pupils' learning. As a result, pupils' confidence in communication, reading and writing is improving rapidly.

Pupils are working harder in lessons; they contribute more confidently and ask questions. It is also very encouraging that so many pupils are asking for homework to support their learning.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons are higher and more consistent than they were at the previous monitoring inspection. However, the standard of work in books and folders is too variable. In some subjects, pupils complete work that is too easy for them and does not challenge them to think deeply.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. Pupils are more energetic in lessons and contribute more actively. They know they will earn rewards, not just for being cooperative and doing as they are told, but for their participation and productivity in lessons. They are honest about their own performance; they want to do well and see their efforts recognised.

The number of serious behaviour incidents requiring physical intervention or exclusion has continued to decline. Pupils told the inspector that behaviour has improved. Pupils are respectful to staff and know that they are there to help and support them. Pupils are not afraid to call upon staff for extra guidance.

Pupils get along together well and are tolerant of differences. There is very little bullying and the use of derogatory, aggressive or casually offensive language is increasingly rare.

Pupils make the most of the programmes and extra activities designed to keep them physically fit, including exercise, visits to the gym, walks and learning about healthy food.

For those pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, there are clear risk assessments with helpful strategies to keep them safe from harm, which are shared with parents and pupils and updated promptly when necessary.

Pupils generally attend well, with many pupils enjoying coming to school, sometimes for the very first time in their lives.

Outcomes for pupils

GCSE grades for Year 11 pupils from the summer of 2016 were disappointing, resulting from the legacy of weak teaching and poor behaviour over the last two years. However, all pupils attended their examinations and all achieved a GCSE grade in each subject they were entered for. All pupils who left the school last year are now in training, education or employment.

Art continues to be a strength both for current pupils and those who took GCSE last year. Pupils' portfolios of work compare well with those of pupils in mainstream schools.

Pupils' English work demonstrates improved progress, particularly in creative and personal writing. Pupils show interest and enthusiasm and write in a lively way. They are able to sustain longer pieces of writing and are acquiring a better knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils have also built up increased levels of confidence when presenting and debating their ideas. They are thoughtful and draw on their emotions and experiences when talking to their peers in formal speaking and listening sessions.

In mathematics, pupils are pushed to challenge themselves with harder work, which they enjoy. However, pupils do not make enough progress with word problems and mathematical reasoning.

Pupils who attend college courses are achieving well, with some making much better progress than was initially expected. These pupils are rapidly progressing to higher-level courses.

External support

Since the previous monitoring inspection, school leaders have commissioned a school improvement partner to focus specifically on improving teaching, learning and assessment. Some initial visits have been made, but it is too early to evaluate what difference this is making to pupils' progress. Links have also been forged with other schools in the Radius Trust and also further afield to support teachers and

leaders with being more ambitious and raising expectations. However, leaders are not providing enough opportunities for staff to learn from good and outstanding special schools.

School leaders make the most of the quality assurance visits carried out by placing local authorities to review their work, particularly with regard to safeguarding and managing pupils' behaviour.