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16 November 2012

Jonathan Howells
Headteacher
The Cedar School
Redbridge Lane
Nursling
Southampton
Hampshire
SO16 0XN

Dear Mr Howells

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to The Cedar School

Following my visit to your school on Thursday 15 November 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor. I spoke by telephone with a representative of the local authority. The school's plan for improvement was evaluated. I also visited every classroom and made a brief observation of lunchtime activities.

Context

Following the school's inspection in September, the Chair of the Governing Body resigned his position and stepped down from the governing body. The newly elected Chair is a long-serving governor. There have been no changes to the school's staffing.

Main findings

The school has set about tackling weaknesses with determination and energy. Swift steps were taken to strengthen governance. The headteacher's efforts have led to the appointment of two associate governors, both of whom bring much expertise and experience of governance. The Chair of Governors is commissioning training for individuals and groups of governors, according to need. The committee structure has been suspended and the governing body now meets as a whole on a monthly basis in order to keep a close eye on the steps the school is taking and the resulting impact. These are very positive steps. The governing body already has a much clearer understanding of the need to balance support for the school with question and challenge.

The previous plan for improvement has been reviewed and a new plan drafted. The plan includes all aspects that were judged to require improvement, actions are appropriate and they are planned in a timely way. However, ways of measuring success are not clearly defined and there is some lack of clarity about who has overall responsibility for implementing different action points and evaluating the impact. The plan includes the consideration of a review of the staffing structure. This is a sensible step, but any restructuring should be firmly based on improving efficiency, maximising the use of people's skills and improving outcomes for the pupils.

There is a positive climate within the school and everyone who spoke with me indicated their commitment to working to be judged a good school as quickly as possible.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- strengthen the school's plan for improvement by: including measurable criteria against which success can be judged; identifying clearly who has overall responsibility for implementing each piece of action; and clarifying which members of staff and the governing body will evaluate progress and hold people to account for improvements.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. I recommend that a further monitoring inspection is carried out towards the end of this academic year to assess how well placed the school is to undergo its next inspection.

External support

The school has been proactive in seeking support from external partners and this has made a good contribution to the improvements in governance. The school works

closely with other special schools in the authority and the headteacher is enlisting the help of his colleagues to carry out lesson observations, for example. The school values support from the local authority's adviser for special educational needs. However, the local authority has had little input so far into the school's drive for improvement. For example, no-one from the local authority has met with the headteacher to talk about the recent inspection and to find out what, if any, support might be needed.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector