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19 February 2013

Mr Bobby Evans
Headteacher
Notton House School
28 Notton
Lacock
Wiltshire
SN15 2NF

Dear Mr Evans

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Notton House School

Following my visit to your school on 18 February 2013, 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. Please pass on my thanks to those who gave of their time to speak with me.

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

Evidence

During the visit I held meetings with you, the Chair and other members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I toured the school, looked at a range of documents and evaluated the school improvement plan.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school's context since the inspection in November 2012.

Main findings

Action has begun to continue the improvements in teaching and students' achievement noted at November's inspection when the school was removed from special measures. The areas for improvement identified at that time have been included in a wider school improvement plan. The overall aim of the plan is for teaching, leadership and governance to be good overall by December 2014. It is also the school's aim for students to make a minimum of four average points progress across each school year. These targets are realistic and achievable within the timescale. The plan does not contain interim measures, however, that would help assess progress along the way towards the longer-term goals. The action plan is wide-ranging. It does not make clear what the most important things are that will make the most difference. Persons responsible for monitoring progress are indicated clearly, and the governing body will play a major part. However, exactly what the governing body will do to monitor and evaluate progress is not explicit.

Improvements in governance have been slower to come. The governing body, with support from the local authority, has taken steps to establish two new committees to oversee different aspects of the school's work. The committees have not met as yet and will not do so for another month. The governing body has several vacancies and efforts to recruit more governors have not met with success. An audit of skills has not been completed. The planned external evaluation of governance has not yet taken place and a date has not been set, although there is an agreement that it should happen by the end of March. Minutes of meetings of the governing body show that its members raise questions about the headteacher's detailed reports. However, their involvement in determining the school's priorities and setting its strategic direction is not strong.

Senior leaders and the governing body have begun to take 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 plan for improvement by indicating what are the most pressing priorities
- include interim measures against which progress towards the long-term targets can be measured
- ensure that the external review of governance is completed as soon as possible
- set out clearly the means by which governors will monitor the school's success in implementing its improvement plan.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. Please send me a copy of the revised action plan when it is completed. I will visit the school in the autumn term 2013 to undertake joint observations of lessons with the deputy headteacher and to meet members of the governing body. Ofsted's report *Getting*

to Good – twelve outstanding special schools can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090171.

External support

The local authority provided the school with effective support during its time in special measures and is continuing to do so. Regular meetings to check on progress are to continue. The school's leaders and governors value the support from the local authority. The local authority has contracted an external consultant to provide support with governance. The consultant helped the governing body draw up the terms of reference for the new committees.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector