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Catherine Smith
Interim headteacher
Haywood Grove School
St Agnell's Lane
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
HP2 7BG

Dear Ms Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Haywood Grove School

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and two other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body with two other governors, and a local authority adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated.

Context

You continue to lead the school in an interim capacity until a permanent appointment is made. At the end of term, three teaching assistants and a teacher will leave the school. A newly qualified teacher has been appointed for September.

Main findings

Staff and governors agree that the inspection findings were fair and helpful in focusing their work on improving teaching and pupils' learning. At the time of the inspection, you had only been in post for two weeks and establishing a culture that focuses on pupils' achievement alongside a different approach to managing pupils' behaviour has gained pace considerably since then. The senior leadership team and the governing body are of one voice in their vision for the future, and agree that there is still some way to go to make sure that changes are firmly established.

The action plan fits well with the time period that leaders and the governing body are aiming for to be confident that they provide a good standard of education, sometime towards the end of the next academic year. You are currently working out how to make sure that the action plan fits with wider development plans for all aspects of school improvement. After attending the Ofsted seminar last week, you have already amended the plan to fine-tune the milestones towards the intended improvements in pupils' achievements. We agreed that these need to be more detailed so that the impact of actions can be measured accurately.

You took the approach to lead decisively from the front, presenting the intended vision of senior leaders and the governing body, together with your action plan, rather than building these things from discussion. This has worked well to provide strong leadership and to generate momentum for rapid change. Staff have taken this well and, for example, are well placed to now take advantage of an intense training programme for behaviour management. This approach has also the desired effect of focusing staff on the quality of teaching and pupils' learning, without excluding their responsibility to deliver good practice in managing pupils' emotional and behavioural needs. As a result, the amount of times that pupils have been excluded from school or have been physically restrained has reduced significantly since your appointment. The senior leadership team are very positive about the difference that your leadership has made in a relatively short period of time.

The governing body gives a strong strategic lead and, together with you, have made sure that a clear way forward helps staff move on from some difficult times in the past. Governors are well represented in the action plan and a timetable for gaining first-hand evidence, linked sensibly to when the actions take place, is in already set out for the whole of the next academic year. Their challenge makes sure that staff have a clear message for high expectations and that they will be held accountable for pupils' achievements.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- make sure that the action plan includes all aspects of school development and that milestones include specific measurements for pupils' achievements.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority keeps a close watchful eye on the school's performance, meeting formally at least half-termly to discuss progress. This is appropriate to the vulnerability of the school until permanent leadership is settled and in response to concerns about the quality of the provision in recent years. But this close contact by no means indicates a lack of confidence in your leadership or in the governance of the school. You relish the challenge from local authority advisers and welcome the useful contacts that advisers help to establish between your staff and those in other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley

Her Majesty's Inspector