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Mr T Collins  
Headteacher  
Portfield School  
Parley Lane  
Christchurch  
Dorset  
BH23 6BP

Dear Mr Collins

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Portfield School**

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 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 September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, the governing body and the directors of Autism Wessex are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the improvements in the quality of provision provided by the school, and the progress students are beginning to make, can be sustained after the secondment of the two senior leaders ends in May 2014
- ensure that adults who support students in lessons are fully trained to help them with their 'academic' learning and that the personnel change considerably less frequently
- provide further training for the governing body so that they can fulfil their duties to the highest standard
- clarify the differing roles and responsibilities of the governing body and the trustees.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and a representative from the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's action and improvement plans were evaluated. During my visit, I had further meetings with you and we undertook a learning walk together where we met the Director of Children's Service of Autism Wessex.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection in September 2013, two senior leaders have been seconded from their classroom duties to work alongside colleagues in their lessons and help to drive school improvement. This secondment is due to end on 2 May 2014. One member of staff has left and another is pending appointment; there is a temporary member of staff covering this class. The governing body have completed an audit of their skills and is in the process of a major reorganisation.

## **Main findings**

The last inspection report of September 2013 noted that you have a clear vision for teaching and learning and that the strategic actions taken over the past year are making teaching increasingly relevant, meaningful and useful for all students. This work has continued. Your previous experience of leading an outstanding school is clearly already paying dividends. With the support of the seconded leadership team you have benchmarked students' attainment, run training days for staff, and completely revised several key policies and procedures. The new appraisal and assessment systems have already paid dividends. They are helping senior leaders and managers to hold all staff more robustly to account for their work. This is, as you note, due to the synergy between the policies and practice. There has been a significant cultural change throughout the school. All staff accept that the basic minimum standard for teaching and learning is now good. The leadership team has been coaching and mentoring colleagues in lessons with a sharp focus on the impact of teaching on students' learning. This and the sharing of the outstanding teaching within the school is leading to rapid improvements in the progress that students are making. The Trust needs to consider how this momentum can be sustained after the secondment ends, with a view to Portfield becoming an outstanding school.

Some of the adults who support students in lessons are from the residential services who work to a 'rolling' shift pattern. As a consequence, teachers do not always have a clear idea about which adults will be in their lessons. You are aware that this frequency of changing support staff is hampering the school to improve and that the support staff need to be better trained. This was an issue that was picked up at the last section 5 inspection, which needs to be swiftly resolved.

The governing body is in a state of transition following the audit of skills and review of how governance can be improved. The proposed new Chair has a wealth of experience in schools, and knowledge of how best to support young people who have autism and complex learning difficulties. The governing body acknowledge that they need further training and that clear terms of reference need to be agreed with the trustees

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**

You and governors have been contacting other schools to share best practice. You are actively seeking external training and support.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**