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Sophie Gurney
Headteacher
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East Sussex
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Dear Mrs Gurney

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hazel Court School

Following my visit to your school on 30 January 2014, 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 October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- review and improve the post Ofsted action plan, ensuring that targets are sharp and measurable, that there is a distinction between monitoring and evaluation and that 'impact' relates to the difference actions make to students' achievements
- strengthen the headteacher's report to the governing body so that sufficient priority is afforded to the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection and equally ensure that governors hold school leaders firmly to account for the necessary improvements, including through performance management
- support the headteacher and deputy headteacher's continuing professional development, including through facilitating visits to good and outstanding special schools

- devise, communicate and implement more robust systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school and use information on students' progress to monitor the effectiveness of the school's actions (including keeping records of progress meetings)
- ensure that teachers and support staff clearly understand the expectations for lesson planning and make sure that these are consistently complied with.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and with the Chair of the Governing Body as well as a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The post Ofsted action plan was evaluated and a range of other documentary evidence including the headteacher's most recent report to the governing body, governing body minutes, examples of the headteacher's monitoring records and tracking data relating to students' progress was scrutinised. You took me on a tour of both sites of the school and we made brief visits to all classes to look at the impact of actions taken since the inspection in October 2013.

Main findings

All teachers and teaching assistants have undergone performance management reviews and have targets linked to raising students' achievements. Training to improve the quality of teaching, particularly the teaching of early reading (phonics) has been delivered by local authority consultants. Additional advice and guidance has been provided to the leaders of English who are confident to support teachers and teaching assistants in refining their skills. Timetables have been reviewed and there is greater clarity about when specific English and mathematics lessons are taking place and how much time should be given to these subjects. As a result a more consistent approach to the teaching of English, mathematics and wider communication and life skills is being secured at both sites of the school. The oldest students are now being taught in ability groups for English, which is helping to ensure that they are all appropriately supported and challenged to make maximum progress. Monitoring of the quality of teaching by senior leaders indicates predominantly outstanding teaching. The series of lesson 'drop-ins' conducted during this visit suggested that this view may be over-optimistic. Lesson plans seen on this visit were not indicative of outstanding teaching.

The tour of the school demonstrated that all adults are involved in identifying and recording students' progress. Notice boards in classrooms include important observational notes that capture relevant information, such as a student tracking an object or showing engagement with a new activity. Students have targets related to reading, writing and mathematics as well as personal, multi-disciplinary targets and formal annual reviews. Systems for managing and analysing academic targets have

recently been reviewed with the support of the local authority and school leaders are beginning to make more sophisticated use of data. Academic targets are now afforded higher priority. The limited data available at this time indicates that most students are making expected progress.

Whilst this visit acknowledged that some significant actions have been taken since the previous inspection, there are other aspects of improvement that require attention. As discussed during the visit, these relate particularly to the strength and impact of senior school leaders. Additional actions required are stated above.

The Chair of the Governing Body brings highly relevant knowledge, skill and expertise to the role. He has a clear view of the strengths of the school and the areas that must be improved. Efforts to recruit high calibre governors to replace experienced governors who will be stepping down over the next eighteen months have been successful. The governing body has not completed the headteacher's performance management within the appropriate timeframe and this must now be acted upon.

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 is providing a range of support to the school in connection with the areas for improvement identified at inspection. This has included training for teachers, support staff and subject leaders regarding the teaching of reading, as well as paired observations to monitor the quality of teaching. Guidance has also been given regarding systems and practices for managing and analysing data and using the information gained to inform future improvement planning. A range of further support, including to enhance the quality of improvement planning is arranged. The headteacher also benefits from her participation in two local groups of special schools that work collaboratively to provide specialist training and support.

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

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector