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Mike Turner and Simon Constantinou
River House School
Stratford Road
Henley-in-Arden
B95 6AD

Dear Mr Turner and Mr Constantinou

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to River House School

Following my visit to your school on 12 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 everyone else who gave up time to meet me and to the teachers and students whose lessons I visited.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- Set challenging targets for individual students that, if met, would represent at least the progress that is expected of them over time, and that would make sure that students catch up on learning lost in the past.
- Develop a succinct means of analysing, summarising and presenting data on the progress of cohorts of students. This would enable leaders and governors to check against national progression guidance and to evaluate whether students' achievement is on track to be good.
- Include in the action plan strategies and targets for further improving attendance and reducing exclusions. Ensure that the gap between River House's figures and the national figures for maintained schools closes rapidly.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with both of you, an assistant headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and the local leader of education who is working with you at River House. We discussed the action taken since the last inspection and the impact that it has had. The action plan and a range of other documents were scrutinised and evaluated. I also toured the school and made brief visits to lessons.

Context

The substantive headteacher has begun a phased return to work and is expected to resume full-time work after the half-term break. One member of teaching staff retired at Christmas and another is to retire at Easter. In addition two members of staff are on long-term sick leave. Two appointments have been made. The senior leadership team has been restructured.

Main findings

The section 5 inspection in November confirmed the findings of a review carried out by the local authority earlier in the academic year. The inspection's outcomes did not come as a surprise and steps were already being taken to bring about improvements in important areas of the school's work.

The quality of teaching is now checked more rigorously and frequently. Action is being taken to support and challenge teachers whose teaching is not typically good. Observations of lessons are supplemented by other activities such as 'book trawls' which give a more rounded and secure picture of the quality of teaching. Staff meetings have become more focused on improving teaching, rather than operational matters.

You are in the process of developing systems for collecting information about students' attainment and progress, and for demonstrating the impact that you have on students' social and emotional development. One of the recent reviews of the progress the school is making, carried out by a consultant, rightly identified the lack of a simple system that would enable you and other leaders to describe and evaluate students' progress. Other weaknesses in assessment, such as a lack of baseline data, were highlighted in another review. In order to demonstrate that students are on track to make at least the progress that is expected of them from their starting points, these weaknesses need to be dealt with quickly. As you test students' reading ages every term, it would also help you to show how you are helping students to catch up if you include a summary of progress in reading as part of your overall analysis.

Your action plan rightly focuses sharply on the main areas for improvement identified at the inspection in November. It includes clear strategies and targets for

improvement in the quality of teaching. However, it does not describe what the intended impact will be on the rate of progress of individuals and groups of students. In order to be absolutely clear that teaching is improving and lesson observations are accurate reflections of typical teaching, the action plan should be strengthened by the addition of targets for students' attainment and progress.

Two areas of relative weakness were not flagged up strongly in the section 5 inspection report. Your recent Raiseonline report shows clearly that the rate of exclusion in the academic year to 2012 was exceptionally high. It also shows that the number of students who were persistently absent was high and that overall attendance was very low. In order to ensure that behaviour and safety are judged to be good at the next inspection, you need to include in the action plan the steps that you are taking to reduce exclusions and improve attendance, along with targets that will illustrate the impact you are having on closing the gap on the national figures.

The governing body has drawn up its own action plan in the light of the findings of its external review. Some steps, such as restructuring committees, have already been taken and the governing body's work is now better organised and purposeful. Governors have a clearer understanding of their role in promoting improvement. The impact of these changes has yet to be seen.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I would like you to send me a copy of your revised action plan when it is available. I intend to revisit the school during the autumn term 2014 to review the data on students' achievement.

External support

You are making good use of support from external partners including the local leader of education and are seeking support both from within Warwickshire and further afield. The local authority has a good understanding of the school's current position and its strengths and weaknesses, and is keeping progress under review. So far, support from external partners has helped you to bring about the improvements noted above and to clarify the next steps you need to take to improve teaching further and thereby students' achievement. Your ambition is to be judged good at the next inspection. You and your external partners know that the pace of change will need to be swift if this ambition is to be realised.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector