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Mr Rick Tracey
Acting Headteacher
Beacon Hill School
Stone Lodge Lane West
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP2 9HW

Dear Mr Tracey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Beacon Hill School

Following my visit with Sa'ad Khaldi Additional Inspector to your school on 25–26 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Executive Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2013

- Make the quality of teaching consistently good so pupils make better progress, particularly in Key Stage 3 and in English, by:
 - improving teachers' subject-specific knowledge and skills, particularly in English
 - making sure that teachers provide enough opportunities for pupils to reinforce their learning and so are able to retain what they have learnt
 - keeping pupils actively involved in learning throughout each lesson
 - giving all staff the training they need to use accurate assessment information effectively in planning lesson activities that challenge pupils at the right level of difficulty
 - making sure that all pupils know and understand what they are capable of achieving in English and mathematics.
- Improve how the school is led and managed by making sure that:
 - the leadership and management of safeguarding are rigorous, all required policies and procedures are fully up to date, and all staff are fully trained in safeguarding procedures
 - capacity for future improvement is secured by strengthening the procedures for accountability
 - all leaders can carry out lesson observations effectively and accurately, and can analyse and interpret data on pupils' progress to identify areas for improvement
 - further training is provided to allow leaders to carry out their roles effectively.
- Work closely with parents and carers to make sure that all pupils attend regularly and to reduce the need for temporary exclusions.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 March 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the work of this special school, visited lessons across a range of subjects and met with the acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the Executive Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors also met two representatives from the local authority and spoke to pupils and staff. Inspectors looked closely at the school's evaluation of progress, minutes of governors' meetings and records of the Strategic Accountability Group. They read the notes of visits made by specialist advisers from the local authority, along with the acting headteacher's records of monitoring of teaching.

Context

Two new teachers joined the school in January, including the head of the primary school. The local authority has appointed an Executive Chair of the Governing Body. The school has started the process of becoming an academy. This move is actively supported by the local authority.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school is working hard to raise standards across subjects, particularly in English and mathematics. Pupils' achievement is still uneven across key stages, although there are early signs of success. As identified when previously inspected, the youngest pupils in the school continue to make good progress from their low starting point. Pupils were observed in English linking letters to the sounds they make (phonics) very effectively to decipher new words. The achievement of secondary-aged pupils is less strong. In 2013, several Year 11 pupils did well in their examinations (GCSE short-courses and Entry Level accreditation). However, this year, the attendance and behaviour of older pupils, added to a legacy of gaps in knowledge and limited accurate assessment data, are impeding pupils' achievement. More work is required to accelerate progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. This includes developing literacy skills across subjects and promoting pupils' love of reading through the use of more effective resources, including the library. There are strengths in achievement, such as in information and communication technology, science, art and music. During this inspection, pupils were observed progressing well in their practical work. They showed much enjoyment in their learning, summed up by a pupil exclaiming enthusiastically, 'Please don't tell me this is Jazz!'

Over a short period of time, a huge amount of effort has been put into gathering accurate assessment data. The acting deputy headteacher, who leads on this work, has received expert advice from the local authority and a data manager from a local school. She has painstakingly reviewed available information and is now establishing

a more robust data-tracking system. Middle leaders have started to analyse and draw conclusions from current data. It is still early days and not all middle leaders are confident in their interpretation of current students' performance. Nonetheless, the will to succeed is strong. Targets are being reviewed to ensure that pupils' and teachers' expectations are raised.

The quality of teaching

Following the first monitoring visit, senior leaders clarified the strategies to review teaching and learning. With the cooperation of staff, they are gathering a more accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching across subjects. No inadequate teaching was observed during this inspection. The proportion of good teaching is rising, although not enough of that seen on this inspection visit was of outstanding quality.

The demands on teachers and teaching assistants are appropriately high. Staff support each other well to deal with pupils' emotional and behavioural needs. The actions taken to ensure the well-being of pupils in lessons are good. Teaching assistants, in some cases, do not contribute enough to pupils' learning; for example, they are not often assessing pupils' progress formally or compiling the portfolios of work for younger pupils. Teachers respond well to the support provided by local authority advisers, and are open to new ideas to improve their planning of lessons and subject knowledge. For example, they involve pupils more often in practical activities throughout the lesson to keep them interested and active. Pupils observed in art were eager to use the rolling pin to work with clay; in mathematics, they were confidently using their arms to demonstrate parallel, vertical and diagonal lines.

Assessment of what pupils already know and can do still requires significant improvement because teachers do not always pitch tasks at the right level to raise standards. In addition, subject-specific vocabulary is not always clearly identified or reinforced across subjects. Some very good practice in self-assessment, such as using coloured cards in mathematics, is not shared widely across the school. As a record of their learning, the work in folders lacks sufficient teachers' comments to show how pupils' skills have improved and what they need to do next. This would also provide an opportunity to engage parents in their pupils' learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Excellent progress has been made on ensuring that pupils stay safe. This year, the opportunity for pupils to go on work experience is being appropriately revised to ensure that they stay safe. Pupils' absence does not currently constitute a safeguarding issue because the school checks promptly where pupils are on a daily basis.

The acting deputy headteacher monitors rigorously the reason for the absence, particularly for pupils who are, or who might be, vulnerable. Attendance is improving

and, at about 95%, it matches the national average for all schools and is better than the average for special schools. Pupils can opt to leave their lesson if they feel the need but most stay and behave well. However, as identified when previously inspected, in Key Stages 3 and 4 the irregular attendance of some pupils is still having a negative impact on their learning.

Attitudes and behaviour are improving as lessons become more interesting and relevant to pupils. Most pupils were proud to show their work to the inspectors and they use resources very carefully and safely. Senior leaders recognise that exclusions are still too high. For this reason, they are working proactively with parents and staff to reduce fixed-term exclusions.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the first monitoring visit, much has been achieved by the acting headteacher in a short space of time. He uses the post-Ofsted action plan efficiently as a tool for improvement and has rapidly gained the trust of staff and governors. The details of a recent staff-engagement survey have not been received yet, but early indication shows that there is encouraging progress from the previous survey. Staff told the inspectors that they find the acting headteacher very approachable and that he is responding to issues and queries positively and very quickly. After a period of change, staff are welcoming some stability in leadership.

Senior and middle leaders are beginning to use more reliable information, across all subjects, on how well pupils are progressing. This will take time to be firmly established. Meetings to check pupils' achievement formally and frequently are not scheduled at present. Middle leaders require further training to understand and use data with confidence. The head of the primary school has a clear vision for the development of a more appropriate curriculum that nurtures the youngest pupils and engages parents more in their children's learning and experience at school. Senior leaders now have a more accurate view of the quality of teaching. However, this term's monitoring of lessons tend to focus too heavily on what the teacher does at the expense of what pupils actually achieve, learn and can do. These observations are not taking a wider range of evidence sufficiently into account, such as portfolio of pupils' work, teachers' marking and other assessment information.

The new Executive Chair of the Governing Body is galvanising all those interested in the success of the school into action. She is driving the transition to academy status with gusto. Arrangements to appoint a permanent headteacher are in hand. The safeguarding issues reported in the section 5 inspection are fully resolved. All safeguarding arrangements are now met and, during this inspection, the school's records for newly-recruited staff were found to be up-to-date and properly maintained. A governor has taken responsibility for overseeing the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and staff. The acting deputy headteacher is coordinating this work very efficiently, liaising with all relevant agencies, in particular social workers.

Governors and senior leaders are committed to developing excellent partnerships with parents. To that effect, they recognise that the school's website requires improvement.

External support

Staff willingly learn from colleagues from other schools and attend subject cluster meetings to share best practice. The local authority subject advisers continue to provide effective support to the school, with positive impact seen in English and mathematics. Local authority officers are readily available for advice on a range of matters including the management of behaviour, the teaching of pupils who have English as an additional language, and financial and human resources issues. The Strategic Accountability Group, chaired by the local authority, has supported leaders and governors over many years. Taking into account the new leadership and governance qualities, its core purpose should now be reviewed so that it adds real value to the success of the school.