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Emma Paramor
Interim Executive Headteacher
Ramsden Hall School
School Lane
Langham
Colchester
CO4 5PA

Dear Mrs Paramor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ramsden Hall School

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 23–24 January 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, members of the learning leadership team, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative of Essex County Council. I was provided with an update on the actions that have been taken since the inspection. The school's post-inspection action plan and the local authority's statement of action were evaluated.

Context

The acting principal of the Billericay site is not present at school due to illness. The acting principal of the Langham site has been appointed as interim executive principal of the two school sites. A learning leadership team has been created at the

Billericay site. This team has been extended by internal promotion of existing staff and the part-time external appointment that will finish at the end of this term. An interim executive board has been appointed by the local authority and began its role on 13 March 2014. Discussions are taking place about linking each of the school sites, separately, with a sponsoring academy.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Following the inspection in January leaders have started a review of individual pupils' curricula, for example by extending work-related opportunities for some pupils. Plans have also been made to improve the match of teachers' specialisms so that, for example, all mathematics lessons will be taught by a teacher with specialist subject knowledge.

The whole-school behaviour policy has been re-launched, including the reintroduction of a points-based system that will make clear whether pupils have met their behaviour and learning expectations in each lesson. It would, however, be valuable to get pupils to contribute more to these developments.

The interim executive board met with staff for the first time shortly before this inspection visit to explain the changes that were being planned.

Leaders are not confident that the current information about pupils' attainments is accurate. The school development plan includes actions to improve the accuracy of these assessments and the effectiveness of their use in planning and teaching, and in monitoring pupils' progress. The timescale for these actions is, however, too slow. It is very important that teachers know exactly what pupils can know, understand and can do so that work is pitched at just the right level to help them learn most effectively. Furthermore, this information is crucial to school leaders, the interim executive board and the local authority so that they can track the progress pupils are making and make sure the improvement actions taken by the school are being effective in addressing its weaknesses.

Appointments have been made to increase the leadership capacity of the Billericay site. However given the school's need for the rapid improvement, especially for the development of effective assessment, planning and progress tracking arrangements, there is not sufficient expertise currently within the school. An external consultant has provided a small amount of input to contribute to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning.

The local authority has discussed with the school how this capacity could be increased. Support is not available from a good or outstanding special school in the

authority. However, there have been discussions about the use of a suitably experienced senior member of staff from a mainstream secondary school, who would be able to work with the newly formed learning leadership team to increase the ability to make the required improvements quickly.

The planned actions within the school's post-inspection improvement plan appropriately focus on areas identified by the inspection. The success criteria and the milestones towards achieving these do not, however, consistently provide enough detail to support effective monitoring of the required improvements.

Similarly, the local authority's statement of action identifies the key improvements required and will provide a suitable monitoring framework for checking that these are addressed. There is, however, some inconsistency between the two plans that needs to be resolved so that expectations are understood fully by all involved.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint a newly qualified teacher to the Langham site.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, and the Director of Children's Services for Essex County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Henry
Her Majesty's Inspector