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9 June 2014

Greg Sadler  
Headteacher  
Howard Middle School  
Beard Road  
Bury St Edmunds  
IP32 6SA

Dear Mr Sadler

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Howard Middle School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2014. 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:

- adjust the school action plan to increase the number of times during the year when leaders and governors will monitor progress against identified actions
- ensure that your records of the quality of teaching in the school are based on a wide range of information including: pupils' outcomes, scrutiny of their work and discussions with groups of pupils
- strengthen governance by ensuring that governors deepen their understanding of effective teaching and its impact on pupils' outcomes, and by learning from best practice in other schools.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, pupils from Key Stages 2 and 3, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since

the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan. I accompanied you on brief visits to classes to speak to pupils and look at their books.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the governing body has restructured its committees so that they focus more sharply on the school's priorities for improvement. Suffolk County Council is currently in public consultation to close the school in 2016 as part of its reorganisation of schools.

## **Main findings**

Despite the uncertain future of the school, leaders and members of the governing body remain committed to raising standards. Your school action plan suitably addresses the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection and identifies three points in the year up until December 2014 when you plan to measure for progress. However, the frequency of these arrangements for monitoring is not robust enough to ensure governors can identify whether you are on track to achieve your targets.

Your current information on pupils' achievement shows that while most are making gains across all year groups in mathematics, reading and writing, progress made in writing for most groups of pupils in Year 5 is too slow. You have increased the profile of writing across the school by training teachers to develop pupils' writing across all subject areas. Pupils with whom I met spoke positively about the 'Growth Mind-set' sessions held every Friday afternoon for every year group. It is making them think more about how they learn, and encourages them to think for themselves and rely less on their teachers to work things out.

The impact of teaching over time on pupils' outcomes is starting to be the determining factor when judging the quality of teaching in the school, although some of your judgements are based on observations of teachers delivering a lesson in isolation. The quality of marking is slowly improving, and is helping pupils recognise what they have done well. However, suggestions from teachers on how pupils can improve are not always clear. This means pupils cannot respond in a way which shows they understand what they have got wrong. You have worked with subject leaders to empower them more in their roles, but also to hold them to account for the quality of teaching in their areas and for pupils' outcomes, which is why standards are improving steadily.

Members of the governing body have responded positively to the external review of governance, and have since restructured their committees so that they can focus more sharply on the school's areas for improvement. This gives greater purpose to governors' proposed visits to the school. However, systems in place for monitoring the delivery of the school action plan are not robust enough. Governors acknowledge the need to strengthen their effectiveness by deepening their understanding of the

performance of different groups of pupils, and would welcome the opportunity to link up with a school where governance is particularly strong.

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 has not been proactive in supporting the school since its last inspection, apart from securing an external review of governance. The local authority has not provided support for developing pupils' writing skills and you have taken it upon yourselves to strengthen this weaker area of pupils' learning. The school has drawn on external consultants to help improve the quality of marking and feedback, the quality of which is improving steadily.

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

Yours sincerely

**John Daniell**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**