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7 November 2014

Mrs Cherie White
The Headteacher
Oaklands Park School
John Nash Drive
Dawlish
EX7 9SF

Dear Mrs White

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oaklands Park School

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 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 July 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:

- enable senior leaders and members of the governing body to monitor more effectively the school's progress by adding more detailed targets in the school's improvement plan with clear milestones for achieving them
- strengthen the ability of the governing body to challenge the work of the school by providing further training, for example through attendance at a 'Getting to Good' seminar organised by Ofsted.
- revise the school admissions policy, through discussions with the local authority, so that it describes clearly the range of special educational needs for which the school provides.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the two deputy principals, three other staff and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I held telephone discussions with the School Improvement Partner and a representative of the local authority. I also toured the school and evaluated the school improvement plan.

Context

Since the previous inspection in July 2014, the headteacher has resigned and you have been appointed as executive headteacher.

Main findings

Since the section 5 inspection in July, you, your leadership team, staff and governors have taken a range of suitable actions to improve the school. You have drafted a school development plan quickly to get changes underway. The plan focuses on all the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection report. In some areas targets have insufficient detail and there is a lack of milestones to help governors and senior leaders measure the rate of progress.

The senior leadership team has been reorganised and now meets weekly. This has strengthened links between the teaching and residential care staff, especially in sharing a consistent approach to safeguarding. You recognise that some job descriptions need revising to reflect changed areas of responsibility. A new system for performance management and for monitoring teaching and learning has been adopted but the cycle has yet to be completed.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils have been improved and were judged good by a recent local authority audit. Staff have received up-to-date training in safeguarding and in behaviour management. Risk assessments have been completed on all pupils and these are linked closely to pupils' behaviour plans. Teaching assistants have been deployed to work more consistently with particular groups. This has provided greater stability for pupils and school information shows that it has helped to improve pupils' behaviour. There are good examples of teachers and teaching assistants planning activities together more effectively, although you understand that more formal arrangements are needed to outline the contribution of teaching assistants in classes across the school.

In recent years the school has admitted pupils with more complex needs. Procedures for admitting new pupils have been strengthened to ensure the school receives more detailed information on pupils' needs in advance. As a next step, you recognise that

the admissions policy needs to be updated to reflect the range of needs for which the school currently provides.

The governing body has taken decisive action to secure leadership of the school. Your appointment as an executive headteacher is proving to be a success. The governing body has been reorganised to provide more effective oversight of the school's work. New committees have been established for example, to check implementation of the school development plan and to liaise with the partner school. Governors are also receiving more detailed reports from staff on aspects of the school's work. The governing body would benefit from up-to-date training to strengthen its role further in challenging the school's performance by attending a 'Getting to Good' seminar organised by Ofsted. An external review of the governing body has not yet taken place but a date has been set for this to happen in January 2015.

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 school is making good use of external support. The local authority has arranged for the governing body to receive advice on financial planning. This has helped governors to draw up plans to reduce the budget deficit and to make more informed decisions about the school's future. The local authority has also helped staff draw up an action plan to improve safeguarding and has audited the impact. Staff have made visits to other special schools to view good practice. This has been particularly helpful in improving the sixth form curriculum, teachers' planning and the assessment of teaching and learning. A School Improvement Partner has visited the school and provided a detailed and helpful report on the school's progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector