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Diane Elleman
Headteacher
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Shenley Road
Milton Keynes
MK3 7AW

Dear Dr Elleman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Romans Field School

Following my visit to your school on 28 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The first monitoring visit took place in November 2013.

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:

- ensure that all staff are fully trained to manage pupils' behaviour effectively and consistently, in order to reduce the number of incidents requiring physical intervention
- review the inclusion area and make sure that all staff adhere to the school policy on its use
- establish the core purpose and values for the school and ensure that staff's expectations of students' attitudes to learning and behaviour are consistently high
- ensure that governors focus more sharply on the areas for improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, a representative from the local authority, a group of staff and members of the Governing Body, including the Chair of Governors, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The inspector spoke to pupils, visited lessons, attended assembly and observed a school council meeting. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including behaviour records, information about performance management, outcomes from monitoring of teaching and a review of actions to improve the school undertaken by the local authority.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit in November 2013, there have been considerable changes to staffing. The headteacher left the school and the deputy headteacher retired. During the summer term of 2014, an executive headteacher from a neighbouring special school was appointed to lead the school for one term, supported by a school improvement adviser. An interim headteacher took up her post in September 2014. At the time of the inspection, the two assistant headteachers were absent from the school. A number of other teaching and support staff were also on long-term absence from the school at the time of the monitoring inspection.

Main findings

Since your appointment as interim headteacher in September 2014, you have set about systematically overhauling procedures and practice in the school. You have acted with determination and resilience to identify exactly what needs to be done to improve teaching and outcomes for pupils. You have focused closely on the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection, including introducing a more effective way of teaching phonics (sounds that letters make) and early reading. Pupils' progress is now tracked more rigorously and you have ensured that teachers' assessments are accurate. You have also rightly made it your business to analyse the patterns of pupils' behaviour so that everyone has a clearer idea of when and why poor behaviour occurs. A useful daily briefing is in place for staff to discuss pupils' needs and how they can be managed.

Staff respect your expertise and experience. They find you approachable and receptive to their ideas and concerns and told me that the school had clearer direction now after a very unsettled period at the end of the last academic year. You are correctly focusing on ensuring that staff develop better relationships with pupils and that there is more therapeutic support to meet pupils' special educational needs and help them to improve their behaviour. You are understandably disheartened by

recent rates of staff absence, but this has not distracted you from your core purpose. You make effective use of supply staff who are well-known to pupils and who work hard with planning and assessing, fulfilling more than their expected duties.

There are clear signs that your plans to establish a calmer, more supportive and nurturing ethos in the school are leading to improved progress and security for pupils. For example, during the monitoring inspection, younger pupils made good progress in a phonics lesson, concentrating hard and coping well with challenges and mistakes, because the teacher and teaching assistants rewarded good behaviour and were sensitive to their needs and difficulties. However, approaches to teaching are not consistent. There is not enough of a shared vision of the school's purpose. Not all teachers and teaching assistants have high enough expectations or common approaches to settling pupils, meeting their needs and managing their behaviour positively.

You have succeeded in ensuring that pupils maintain a positive outlook on their learning. For example, the assembly provided good opportunities for pupils to talk about their achievements and be rewarded for their work. Parents appreciate the chance to attend these occasions. Pupils listened to each other respectfully and genuinely appreciated each other's successes. During the monitoring inspection pupils sat calmly together at lunchtime, enjoying conversations and debate with staff and each other. The pupils on the school council take their duties seriously and contribute sensible ideas about improving the school.

There is now a robust analysis of behaviour incidents and systems are in place for identifying when, why and where incidents occur. You have succeeded in reducing the number of serious behaviour incidents. However, the management of behaviour still requires improvement because not all staff are skilled in preventing behaviour incidents from escalating. For example, some staff resort too quickly to physical intervention to manage challenging behaviour, when different strategies would divert pupils and support them in making better choices. School leaders have not reviewed the use of the inclusion area, including the 'calm room' and as a result, it is not always used appropriately to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

Previous vacancies on the Governing Body have now been filled and there is a much stronger team in place with members from appropriate professional backgrounds. Governors have a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve the school and question leaders rigorously. However, they spend too much time on operational matters, rather than focusing closely on the areas for improvement and how their work is moving the school towards being judged good at the next inspection.

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 rightly regards the school as a high priority and have ensured that considerable resources are made available to support the school, including the presence of the school improvement advisor on site several times during the week, support with governance and the guidance from the special educational needs and behaviour advisory teams. The school is helpfully linked with other special schools and their leadership teams. The local authority is wisely seeking to make more strategic and focused use of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams to support pupils with improving their behaviour and well-being.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector