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Bene Willis  
Headteacher  
Sycamore Short Stay School  
Old Farm Estate  
Dudley  
DY1 3QE

Dear Ms Willis

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sycamore Short Stay School**

Following my visit to your school on 27 February 2015, 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 November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and management committee 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:

- action plans have specific measurable targets and indicate how, when and by whom the impact of actions will be checked, evaluated and communicated to the management committee
- the progress of students in Year 3, 4 and 5 is accelerated in writing and mathematics
- all students use the feedback and guidance provided by teachers to improve their work
- accommodation is provided for the medical examination and treatment of students and the short-term care of sick or injured students which includes a washing facility and is near a toilet

- information from excluding schools is in sufficient detail to enable the school to plan appropriate intervention, guidance and support, especially for the most vulnerable students.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and representatives of the management committee and the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Meetings were also held with the primary and secondary curriculum and assessment leaders. The headteacher showed me around the school and we visited all classes. During these visits to classrooms, I looked at the work in students' books and spoke to them about their learning. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's post-Ofsted inspection action plan and information about students' progress and behaviour.

## **Context**

Since the inspection in November 2014, one teacher has left the school. As a result, the number of classes has been reduced from four to three. There have been no other significant changes.

## **Main findings**

The headteacher, school leaders and management committee have acted quickly to address the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. A post-Ofsted inspection action plan has been produced which includes appropriate actions for improvement. However, the plan does not clearly identify how success will be measured or how, when and by whom the impact of the actions will be checked, evaluated and communicated to the management committee.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have introduced a project-based approach to learning. For example, during this inspection students were purposefully engaged in activities involving writing about and designing environments for animals kept in a zoo. As a result, information provided by the school shows that students in Year 6, 7, 8 and 9 are, from their starting points, making the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the progress of students in Year 3, 4 and 5 is less than expected in writing and mathematics.

Teachers recently undertook training that included how to effectively assess students' work and provide helpful feedback. As a consequence, most students know how to improve their work. However, a small minority of students do not act upon the advice given by teachers.

Since the last inspection, all school staff have undertaken training led by an educational psychologist on how to engage reluctant learners and to effectively deal with students who are agitated or distressed. Staff said that they now feel more confident in ensuring students' needs are met and in dealing with difficult, disruptive and challenging students. As a result, students' behaviour is improving. The number of serious behaviour incidents, physical interventions and fixed term exclusions has reduced significantly.

School leaders, staff and students, in collaboration with an educational psychologist, have reviewed the use of 'quiet rooms'. As a result, the floor covering in the quiet rooms have been replaced. The environment has been further enhanced by the painting of murals on the walls. The risk of students hurting themselves in the quiet rooms has been reduced. However, the school does not have suitable accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of students and the short-term care of sick or injured students which includes a washing facility and is near a toilet.

Since the inspection in November, the curriculum and assessment leaders have worked with mainstream schools. They have led training for teachers and teaching assistants on learning and teaching approaches and assessing students' work. As a result, information provided by the school shows that the quality of teaching has improved and the majority of students are making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

### **External support**

The local authority provides effective support for the school by commissioning the support of a short stay school service manager and human resources and financial services support. However, the school and the local authority have not ensured that the information they receive from excluding schools is always sufficient in order to plan appropriate intervention, support and guidance for individual students, especially those that are most vulnerable.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Management Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**