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Ms Judy Douglas
The Headteacher
Link Secondary School
82-86 Croydon Road
Croydon
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Dear Ms Douglas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Link Secondary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 March 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 October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the responsible charity 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 accurate starting points for students are established so that teachers and leaders can determine how much progress they are making and arrange further interventions when their rates of progress are not good
- draw on a wider range of external support so that teachers can quickly develop effective teaching and learning strategies in order to raise achievement across the school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the executive headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, together with

the director of the charity responsible for the school, to review how the school action plan was being implemented. A representative of the local authority's disability and special educational needs department was contacted to discuss how the school worked with the authority to support students. The school action plan was evaluated, along with other documentation detailing the school's work, including the minutes of governing body meetings and the single central record of employment checks. You accompanied me on a tour of the school to speak informally to students and look at some of their work.

Context

The headteacher, in post at the time of the last inspection, has resigned from the end of this term after a period of long-term absence. You have stepped up from your role as deputy headteacher and have worked with the executive headteacher of the Link Primary School, to lead the school in his absence. You have made a temporary appointment to the post of deputy headteacher, until permanent post holders are recruited for September 2015. A new director for the charity, The Link Day School Limited, was appointed to her post four weeks ago.

Main findings

You have quickly identified where teaching has needed to be strengthened. This has resulted in the adoption of new systems and procedures to help you monitor the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers are more strongly held to account for the progress their students make and carry out regular assessments to inform the new achievement tracking systems. You have recognised that accurate starting points were not correctly assessed when students joined the school and have started to address this. This will enable you to measure how much progress students are making across different years, classes and subjects over time. You have a better understanding of where significant gaps in learning need to be filled and when students must make accelerated rates of progress in order to catch up. This has allowed you to plan for further professional development opportunities for all teachers, such as agreeing and implementing a whole school marking policy that is consistently applied. Further work to support teachers' individual training needs is planned. This will include opportunities to moderate and share good practice with teachers from other schools.

The quality of writing across the school remains a key area for improvement. Additional training and resources are planned and the impact of these interventions will need to be judged once fully implemented. However, you are now in a position to judge how successful your actions have been, using data which is accurate and reliable. This is a significant improvement. The level of challenge across groups, years and classes is still variable but teachers are now planning their lessons using

accurate assessment information. This is helping them to set work at the correct level. You are reviewing the curriculum so that all students are offered accreditation and learning opportunities that correspond with their interests, skills and career choices.

The new senior leadership team has quickly become established and is driving forward the necessary improvements. Together with new systems and procedures you are starting to measure the impact of your actions on students' outcomes more carefully. The school improvement plan correctly identifies the actions that need to be taken but does not yet identify specific monitoring roles for senior leaders and governors. Timescales and milestones should also be added to help you judge if improvements have been successful or are happening quickly enough.

Governors have quickly arranged for a review of external governance to be carried out and this has been completed recently. They have accepted the recommendations made and have been proactive in implementing them. They have attended further training sessions and are fully aware that they need to provide better levels of support and challenge to school leaders. They have an improved understanding of how the pupil premium and other funds are having an impact on students' achievement. They are seeking ways to improve the quality of information provided to parents, including via the school's website. They have realised that they need to be provided with more information by leaders and have agreed on how they would like this to be presented to them.

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

You are drawing on the good practice of the primary school, a provider recently judged outstanding. The executive headteacher supports you for two days a week while permanent post holders are appointed to lead the school from September. The external review of governance was commissioned from the National Governance Association and you have continued to draw on their expertise to implement the recommendations made in the review. Further governor training has been provided by Merton local authority governor services who have assisted you in recruiting a new clerk for the governing body. You have also worked with another special school to help teachers agree what level their students are working at. Further support has been commissioned from external consultants to address specific areas of the improvement plan. Leaders and governors are aware that further external support and guidance would be beneficial in raising teaching standards across the school. The new director is actively working to develop such links with other providers and organisations.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Sutton and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox

Her Majesty's Inspector