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Mike Turner
Headteacher
River House School
Stratford Road
Henley-in-Arden
B95 6AD

Dear Mr Turner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to River House School

Following my visit to your school on 17 March 2015 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- obtain written confirmation that the school's procedures for ensuring safety in the event of a fire meet statutory requirements. Please send me a copy of the confirmation by email by 17 April 2015.
- carry out a thorough audit of all policies and procedures to protect students and keep them safe. Take action to rectify any omissions.
- appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of students who are looked after and ensure that this person has appropriate training.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority

and the consultant headteacher who is working with you at River House. We discussed the action taken since the last inspection and the impact that it has had. The current action plan and a range of other documents were scrutinised. I walked around the school at break time with the Chair of the Governing Body. I also met members of staff with responsibility for outdoor education and personal, social and health education.

Context

There have been no significant changes to staffing since the last monitoring inspection.

Main findings

The pace of change is too slow. There appears to have been limited success as a result of the implementation of the previous action plan, and some aspects of the school's work have deteriorated.

Attendance is very low, and has fallen over the past year. The attendance of students who attend alternative provision is particularly low.

The quality of teaching still requires improvement. It cannot be judged to be good because it is not, over time, having a consistently good impact on students' learning and progress. I note that you and other staff observe most teachers once a term and that your observations suggested that all teaching was good. However, the observation forms that have been completed show that you do not evaluate how the teaching contributed to students' progress during the lesson that you watched. A review carried out by the local authority in December identified that much teaching requires improvement.

Although there has been an increase since last year in the proportion of students who are assessed as making progress at a rate better than before they started at River House, about a quarter of the students are not, in English and mathematics.

You intend to continue to use national curriculum levels and 'APP' materials to track progress across Key Stage 3. Of course, it is up to you and your staff to decide how you wish to assess attainment and record progress. However I would suggest that you cross-reference the 'APP' materials with the end-of-key-stage statements for the new national curriculum, to be sure that you are teaching all that is required and assessing everything that you need to.

You have drawn up a new learning improvement plan to tackle the areas of weakness identified during the local authority's review. The impact of the previous action plan was not evaluated, so there is no clear baseline from which to measure the success of this plan. The new plan contains a list of actions and when they will be carried out, but does not then say what the impact is intended to be, or by when. It is not strategic and does not make clear exactly what you and the staff are

working towards. The plan does not reflect the urgency that is needed or the outcomes that would be necessary for River House to be judged good at its next inspection.

We discussed the need for your policies and procedures for safeguarding and child protection to be updated in order to take account of the requirements of the document 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. For example, a lead teacher for looked-after children has not been appointed and the current policy does not indicate how allegations against the headteacher should be handled, nor what would be done should one student make an allegation about another. There is also no code of conduct for staff.

I was concerned that several fire doors were locked. You assured me that all staff have keys and that should a fire occur they would quickly open the doors. You said that the local fire officer was in agreement with this procedure. I advised that you obtain this agreement in writing. The Chair of the Governing Body was taking action about this before I left.

River House's budget is considerably overspent. This needs to be dealt with and a plan for recovery agreed.

We discussed that there have been improvements in some areas of River House's work. The rate of exclusion has fallen substantially over this academic year. You have clearer and simpler systems for collecting and analysing information about students' progress. It was also good to hear members of staff speak with enthusiasm about their work in outdoor education and citizenship and personal, social and health education.

This inspection has raised concerns about the school's effectiveness. The report will be considered by the Regional Director when determining the timing of the school's next inspection.

External support

A consultant headteacher has recently been appointed by the local authority to work with you two days a week. As yet, it is too soon to gauge any impact, although staff spoke positively about this development.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector