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Ms Rachel Forward
Headteacher
Hardwick Middle School
Mayfield Road
Bury St Edmunds
IP33 2PD

Dear Ms Forward

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Hardwick Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 18 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you and the executive headteacher, the consultant headteacher currently supporting you, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised the statement of action produced by the local authority and your school action plan. I visited classrooms with you, looked at students' books and spoke to students about their work.

Context

Since the inspection in January, one teaching assistant has left the school but there have been no other changes in the teaching staff. A new business manager and administration assistant for the special educational needs department have been appointed. The school is preparing to close in July 2016; there will be no new intake this September.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Supported by the executive headteacher and a local consultant headteacher, you and your senior team have continued to implement the improvements to teaching that were referenced in the January 2015 inspection report. Since January, you have also been able to fulfil your role as headteacher full time, which has allowed you to spend more time in lessons observing the quality of teaching, monitoring the level of challenge offered to students and scrutinising work in books. In the light of the closure of the school next summer, your approach to curriculum planning and to ensuring that staffing is appropriate for the rest of this school year and from September is creative and maximises the resources available to you.

Visits to mathematics and English lessons, in particular, showed that more-able students were challenged by the work set and were well motivated to learn. Books showed evidence that many had made sustained progress from September 2014. Progress in books is not as evident for less-able students. Leaders from your partner school have moderated teachers' assessments in English and mathematics. Information based on these assessments shows that gaps between the progress of your disadvantaged students and other students in the school are closing. This data shows improving progress across the school overall and identifies variations between year groups and classes, enabling you to take action to support teaching as necessary.

Current school progress data is also being used effectively to identify which groups of students or individuals need support to address gaps in knowledge. The impact of these interventions is being monitored closely, with changes made as needed. For example, you have now increased the number of days the homework club is available for targeted students because of the evidence that this has increased the rate of progress of the students involved.

Your school action plan and the local authority statement of action address the key issues identified in the January report. The resources and financial commitment given by the local authority are substantial but are only now starting to be made available. An initial review of teaching, led by the local authority, will inform more precisely the advisers who are due to begin working with your mathematics and English departments in the summer term. Since January, you have worked closely with a performance adviser from the local authority and continued to benefit from the experience of a consultant headteacher and your executive headteacher as you drive forward the improvements in teaching and learning.

Governors have undertaken an internal review of how the extra funding for supporting disadvantaged students is used. An external review is still being planned. The reorganisation of the governing body means that all meetings are now focused on standards and the progress of all groups of students. The school action plan identifies which governors are responsible for monitoring key areas and when this will be undertaken.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Associate Inspector

Copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where the school is an academy)