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22 April 2015

Mrs Cath Taylor
Interim Executive Headteacher
Landgate School, Bryn
Landgate Lane
Bryn
Ashton-in-Makerfield
Wigan
Greater Manchester
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Landgate School, Bryn, Wigan

Following my visit to your school on 21 April 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 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 the school's strong links with a local outstanding special school remain secure and sustainable
- ensure governors work effectively with the local authority to devise and follow a suitable plan that seeks to strengthen governance of the school
- carry out an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim executive headteacher, students, teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I took the opportunity to observe pupils' arrival at school. I also visited several classrooms during a brief tour of the school. I scrutinised a range of other documents provided by the school, for example, the outcomes of monitoring activities, performance management records and a report following the external review of governance.

Context

Since the inspection an interim executive headteacher has been appointed to lead the school, following the retirement of the headteacher. The interim executive headteacher is the substantive headteacher of a local outstanding special school.

Main findings

Since the inspection governors have worked quickly and effectively with the local authority to identify and appoint an experienced interim executive headteacher to lead the school. Schools leaders are in no doubt of the need to improve quickly. Staff I spoke with have a 'can do' attitude which is fired by the executive headteacher's determination to improve the quality of teaching as a means of raising standards. Pupils' views are now given full consideration and their suggestions are frequently acted upon. The school's new motto which was designed by pupils, 'bringing learning to life', encapsulates the green shoots of improvement which are beginning to show through.

Leaders have taken swift action to improve the safety of pupils as they arrive at and leave the school each day. The systematic approach to managing pupils' transport while on the school site ensures vehicles' engines are switched off and the school gates are closed before pupils alight or board the vehicles. I observed pupils getting off their transport, being greeted by adults and then walking to their classrooms in a safe and orderly manner. This in turn leads to a calm and purposeful start to the school day for all pupils. Without exception, those pupils spoken with feel getting on and off their transport is much safer than before the inspection.

Leaders have introduced an effective system to check the quality of teaching across the school. The executive headteacher has worked alongside other leaders to observe teaching and to scrutinise pupils' work in order to build an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Consequently, the school improvement plan gives a clear direction of what the school needs to do to become good.

Leaders have put in place robust systems to ensure that the school's own records of pupils' progress are precise. The executive headteacher has used effectively her links with her own school to check the accuracy of teachers' assessment of what pupils' know and can do. Furthermore, leaders from the executive headteacher's own school have worked well with teachers of Landgate School in order to identify gaps in pupils' communication and language skills.

Teachers have a better understanding of pupil's specific needs and this is evident in the improved quality of their lesson planning. For example, students in Key Stage 5 now benefit from an increased emphasis on practicing their basic skills in real-life scenarios during frequent visits into the local community. Although it is too early to judge the impact of this action on students' overall progress, the school's own records show that Key Stage 5 students increasingly self-confident. The school's records also show that this improvement is welcomed by parents.

Leaders have reduced the poor attendance by a significant minority of staff. Overall staff attendance is now high, an improvement compared to before the inspection. Teachers spoken with feel that improved attendance by adults across the school has contributed to better relationships between pupils and adults, which in turn has led to improvements in pupils' behaviour. This view is corroborated by the school's own data which show a reduction in the number of serious incidents compared to before the inspection.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

There is a gathering momentum towards the school becoming good because leaders have drawn appropriately on the expertise of external partners. Representatives of the local authority have brokered support from a local outstanding school which is bolstering leadership and the quality of teaching across the school. Representatives of the local authority have also provided support in aspects such as the school's use of performance data, health and safety and speech, language and communication, all of which are contributing to the improved progress of pupils.

Local authority officers have conducted an external review of governance at the school. The school's records of governing body meetings show that meetings are attended well. However, findings from the external review of governance show that the governing body is not fulfilling several of its statutory duties for example, setting the headteacher's performance targets. The report also indicates that, despite the best efforts of a significant minority of governors, there is little appetite amongst the majority of governors to attend governor training provided by the local authority or to complete audits designed to identify gaps in governors' skills. This aspect of leadership could put at risk the school's trajectory towards becoming good.

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

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector