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Mrs Marcia Crow
Headteacher
Beechview School
Guinions Road
High Wycombe
HP13 7NT

Dear Mrs Crow

Special measures monitoring inspection of Beechview School

Following my visit to your school on 23 April 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the Chair and members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), the headteacher of another local school and a representative of the local authority. We visited all classes together, speaking with some pupils and looking at their work. I checked school documentation, including reports and data about the progress made by pupils. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's short-term improvement plan.

Context

The school has required special measures since 2012. At a full inspection in December 2014, it was found to continue to require special measures. Since that inspection, the IEB has appointed a new and experienced Chair. Three days before my inspection visit, you began as the interim headteacher. This followed the formal departure of the previous permanent headteacher. In recent weeks, headteachers of other local schools have also acted as Beechview's headteacher for short periods.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The many changes in leadership since the December inspection have led to the school making a slow start in addressing the issues causing it to continue to require special measures. You know there is much to do. We discussed together the prime importance of building sustainable systems for the future. The members of the IEB with whom I met understand too.

We agreed that the lessons we observed together had clear learning purposes and relevant tasks for pupils. Displays in classrooms were attractive and stimulating. Pupils generally contributed with interest, presented much of their work neatly, and were happy to discuss what they were doing. However, much of the work set for them lacked challenge; too little was expected of them and their attainment remains too low. The data you showed me indicate some improvement in pupils' progress since Christmas, especially in Year 6. However, you expect that the attainment of current Year 6 pupils in this year's national tests will be no better than last year's very low outcome. Writing is particularly weak throughout the school.

Pupils entitled to the support of the pupil premium fare better in some year groups than others; their achievement is very mixed. The school's use of pupil premium funding has been suitably reviewed. The local authority helpfully now provides a consultant to support the evaluation of impact of pupil premium expenditure. Many classes are taught currently by temporary staff. Work is underway to try to employ a permanent team. The school has successfully recruited two new deputy headteachers who are due to start work in June. Each will have suitable senior responsibilities, as well as class teaching commitments. There is no special educational needs coordinator. Currently, this role is fulfilled by a teacher from a nearby school. It is most important that the school should develop its own internal capacity for this vital work. The curriculum, as you have rightly identified, is weak. There is no effective leadership of subjects by staff. Furthermore, the school does not have proper arrangements for staff performance management. Both you and the IEB are aware of this. You already correctly plan to improve and sharpen this considerably in time for the next academic year. In the meantime, it is important that the newly shaped pupils' progress meetings provide both support and accountability for staff.

The school's own short-term improvement plan is unsuitable. It only covers the period to the end of this school year. The planned actions are reasonable but do not go far enough. Firmer action is needed. The short-term approach was brought about by the leadership changes, but the school needs a longer-term plan to address its many problems. Furthermore, the current plan lacks measurable objectives linked specifically to improving outcomes for pupils.

The work of the IEB is developing. The new Chair provides firm leadership. Members are eager to support the school and are keenly aware of many of the difficulties it faces. They realise clearly that future improvement work must be sustainable. Governance has been suitably reviewed since the inspection. The report indicates some positive progress but provides a long list of further points for action, which need to be followed through. The minutes of IEB meetings are clearly written. They indicate, however, that board members are not yet asking suitably challenging questions about the school's performance.

The local authority has been unable to bring the improvements needed. However, the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, working on behalf of the local authority, has revised its approach and now has a firmer relationship with the school. The local authority and IEB have started to invest in significant levels of support and training for staff, aiming to secure higher standards. However, although its statement of action has a number of positive elements, for example about the importance of the school locally, it needs significant revision. It is too short term. The statement is not suitably dovetailed with the school's plan.

From a fractured and unstable position, the school and its partners need to work together coherently towards sustainable and secure improvement. It is good to note that positive support is available from leaders of nearby schools. It is of paramount importance that the school and local authority plans are credible and show how they are having an impact. When I visit next, I will check this carefully.

Following the monitoring inspection these judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector