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Mrs Barbara Capper
Headteacher
Westcliff School
First Avenue
Dawlish
EX7 9RA

Dear Mrs Capper

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Westcliff School

Following my visit to your school on 20 January, 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. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- revise the school improvement plan to tackle the areas for improvement with greater clarity and urgency
- set interim milestones for end-of-year targets so that leaders can check how well and how quickly the school is improving
- specify who is responsible for checking the impact of actions to improve the school, and who is accountable for the progress being made towards addressing each key area for improvement
- use the outcomes of the planned external review of governance to increase governors' knowledge and understanding of their role in ensuring the school becomes good at its next inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plans and scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's records of the outcomes of monitoring activities undertaken by leaders, and governing body minutes. I undertook a focused tour of the school, spoke with pupils, and looked at English books with you and the deputy headteacher.

Context

There have been no changes to staffing since the inspection. The governing body, together with the local authority, is currently in discussion with St Christopher's Multi-Academy Trust, for the school to become a sponsored academy, sponsored by the Diocese of Exeter.

Main findings

You have begun to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Leaders understand the need to improve pupils' achievement and progress, particularly in writing. However, the pace of change is too slow. You are investigating a future conversion to academy status. This, and time spent by you and the governors in filling vacancies on the governing body, has stalled the impact of planned improvements. You have rightly focused on improving the quality of writing in all subjects. Teachers are benefitting from personalised coaching and mentoring from the deputy headteacher and English subject leader. This is supporting them in planning and teaching lessons more effectively. Work in pupils' books shows evidence of frequent opportunities to develop their extended writing across many subjects. Marking consistently sets out pupils' next steps of learning which is enabling them to increase their confidence and ability to improve their own work. However, leaders do not plan regular opportunities to monitor the effectiveness of their actions and check pupils' work in their books. This is slowing the pace of improvement.

The school improvement plans include the areas for development identified at the last inspection. However, they do not include measurable targets linked to specific actions. Precise timescales and milestones to achieve the planned outcomes are missing. Also, the role of governors in checking the work of the school is unclear. As a result, the school is not in a position to make the improvements at the speed needed to ensure pupils make good progress.

You have improved systems for checking the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Teachers are now being held to account for identifying pupils needing support. They are planning and teaching a range of interventions to speed their progress. Teachers

now meet regularly with the special needs leader and with year group leaders to check pupils' achievement and progress and plan pupils' next steps of learning. The school's records show a higher proportion of pupils are now on track to reach the expected levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. However, the school accepts this is still not good enough. The legacy of underachievement has not been tackled with the necessary urgency. This is limiting the current capacity to bring about improvement.

Governors' knowledge and understanding of their role is currently limited. This is hindering the pace of improvement. Minutes of recent meetings demonstrate little challenge and no evidence of governors asking challenging questions to find out for themselves the impact of actions taken. A number of governors are new to their role and they rely on you to explain how well the school is performing. The external review required following the inspection has yet to take place. The lack of urgency to undertake this review of governors' roles and responsibilities has further limited improvement. Unfilled vacancies are another factor in delaying the improvement at the pace needed to get the school to good.

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

I will arrange to visit the school again, as agreed at this visit, to evaluate actions taken following this inspection. You have agreed to send me the revised action plan in four weeks and the findings of the review of the governing body to enable me to check on their effectiveness.

External support

You have received insufficient support from the local authority. The senior local authority officer has an in-depth understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, you have not received the support and challenge you need to set the school on the path of improvement quickly. Support for subject leaders is now being planned and the external review of governance will be led by the local authority next month.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy
Her Majesty's Inspector