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11 June 2015

Mr Garry Walker
Ramsden Hall School
Heath Road
Ramsden Heath
Billericay,
Essex
CM11 1HN

Dear Mr Walker

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ramsden Hall School

Following my visit to your school on 9–10 June 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of appropriate authority for Ramsden Hall School
cc. Dave Hill and Heather Faulkner Director of Children's Services for Essex

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good on the Billericay site by making sure that:
 - teachers plan interesting and challenging work
 - marking is used effectively to help students to improve their work
 - teachers set work at the right level, particularly for the more-able students.

- Improve students' behaviour and safety, particularly on the Billericay site by ensuring that:
 - fixed term exclusions and racist incidents decrease
 - attendance improves further throughout the school
 - the behaviour policy is understood by all staff and students, applied consistently by staff and its effectiveness checked by leaders.

- Improve leadership and management at all levels, especially on the Billericay site, including governance, by making sure that:
 - accurate records which track students' past and current progress are used effectively by leaders to evaluate the school's work and by teachers in planning their lessons
 - the roles of subject leaders are developed, particularly in English and mathematics, so that teaching and achievement improve
 - governors and other leaders promote a shared understanding of good practice in teaching and learning across both sites, to secure equal access to a similarly good standard of education and support for all students.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should also be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on insert date of inspection

Evidence

Meetings were held with you, members of the senior leadership team, the consultant headteacher, representatives of the interim executive board (IEB), and a representative from the local authority. I observed lessons throughout the school, some jointly with you. I scrutinized school documents, including records of the monitoring of teaching and achievement, minutes from the IEB meetings and records of Local Authority notes of visit. I met with a group of pupils, spoke to pupils in lessons and scrutinized a sample of pupils' work. Safeguarding records were checked and risk assessments reviewed.

Context

Since 1 April 2015 Ramsden Hall has become a single site school operating independently of the Langham site which is now part of an academy trust. The school is currently led by an acting headteacher, two assistant headteachers and one senior teacher. Since the last visit, one teacher has left the school. Two teachers are currently on long term ill-health absence. One additional teacher has taken up her appointment and two further teachers have been appointed to start in September 2015. The IEB and the local authority are continuing to seek an academy sponsor for the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Teachers' assessments of students' abilities are increasingly accurate because assessments are checked internally. While the quality of teaching has started to improve, students' progress and attainment remains inconsistent across the school. Information relating to pupils' progress is not yet secure because historic assessment data was inaccurate or not available. It is therefore difficult for leaders to be precise about the progress pupils have made in the past. Leaders have begun to deal with this by having current assessment information validated by an outstanding local secondary school. Current mathematics data are now judged to be accurate. The data show that pupils have made at least expected progress over the last term. Plans are in place to ensure assessment is accurate in all subjects this term.

Students' books and work files show that expectations of the quality of their work are rising in some subjects. For example, in mathematics, books are well organised and students can explain the benefit of setting their work out neatly. As a result of the high expectations of teachers, the progress of pupils in mathematics is improving. However, these increased expectations are not yet consistently in place throughout the school and past low expectations continue to affect some year groups, particularly where the students have been in school for the longest periods of time.

Achievements of pupils and staff are now celebrated weekly. As a result, the drive for improvement is engaging staff and students together. Students' awards reflect their attendance as well as their achievement and the school community is actively engaged in striving for higher standards.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching remains variable. However, leaders now monitor the quality of teaching and how well it is supporting students' learning in a systematic and appropriate way. As a result, it is improving and inadequate teaching is challenged robustly. There is some recent evidence of teachers' improving lesson planning to meet students' individual needs and starting points. This is because teachers are starting to use assessment more carefully. Leaders' continued focus on making sure that teachers' feedback to students is meaningful has been effective and the results of this are evident in the improving quality of work seen in students' books. They have a better understanding of the things they do well and the aspects of their work they need to improve. There are still some teachers who are not using these strategies well enough.

Teachers are making better use of the information they have on students' difficulties and the things that affect their behaviour to plan successful lessons. This means that activities engage and challenge students more in an environment they find manageable. As a result, they are making better progress and enjoying their learning.

Learning support assistants are often effectively deployed. Their skilful use of behaviour management techniques often refocuses pupils on the work in hand and ensures that the environment in which pupils learn remains calm. However, at times students still rely too heavily on the support they receive and as a result do not take responsibility for their own learning or develop their understanding independently. Consequently, they do not always make the progress of which they are capable.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Rates of serious behavioural incidents and exclusions have recently reduced because staff are beginning to manage behaviour effectively and consistently across the school. The introduction of a simple but effective points system, understood by staff and pupils, to reward positive behaviour, means that the raised expectations of how students conduct themselves are beginning to be met. Students say are that the points system is fair and that the rewards in place for when their behaviour is good are working well. They know and understand the actions staff will take when their behaviour does not meet the expectations now established.

Staff have very recently been re-trained in the management and recording of challenging behaviour and the use of physical intervention. This has increased their

confidence to step in and deal with the challenging incidents. As a result, issues arising are managed before more serious problems occur. The recording of incidents, including physical interventions, has improved and staff now ask students to reflect with them on what has happened and the consequences of their actions. This information is used to inform future management of students' behaviour in the most appropriate way. Because the information recorded about these incidents is still not detailed enough, potential risks and challenges to students are not always identified.

Attendance remains a significant concern. Attendance is low at a number of alternative education provisions made for students. Many of these are arrangements made in the past and they have involved current Year 11 pupils. Leaders recognise that some of these do not adequately meet the needs of students and that improvements need to be made. Leaders' records show that the number of exclusions from school have reduced rapidly since the start of the year.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leaders and managers now leading the school are determined to improve the quality of the teaching and the achievement of the pupils. This vision is supported by all staff and there is a noticeable improvement in staff morale and increased confidence in school leaders.

Leaders' self-evaluation is increasingly rigorous and this gives them a clearer view of the school's performance. Actions are being taken to address the weaknesses identified and there is evidence of improvement in students' achievement and behaviour as a result.

Leaders and governors have rightly started to review the school's policies because they are no longer relevant now that the school operates on one site. New policies are having greater impact because staff understand and implement them well. For example, the new behaviour policy is making a significant difference to the increasingly consistent approach to the challenge of poor behaviour. As a result, pupils have more confidence that staff are fair when dealing with difficulties and so are more willing to engage in the conversation.

The safeguarding of students has improved. All checks on staff are now in place and policies and procedures for the welfare and health and safety of students are implemented effectively, such as those relating to smoking on site. Staff have challenged this issue and a significant reduction in students smoking has been achieved.

The curriculum is developing appropriately. Students and parents have very recently been advised of the options that students can access in Years 9, 10 and 11. This is

the first time that students at Ramsden have been able to select options from a broad curriculum offer; they are very excited by this opportunity. The breadth of the curriculum now being offered reflects the increased aspirations for students.

Members of the IEB have supported the school well through a significant period of change. Experienced board members are well-equipped to challenge the school where appropriate and do not hesitate to do so. Members of the board have taken responsibility for monitoring different aspects of development. This has strengthened strategic planning and enabled board members to understand the expectations for improvement. As a result, they are holding leaders to account more rigorously for how well the school improves.

External support

The local authority continues to provide appropriate support and challenge to the school through regular monitoring meetings at least fortnightly. Leaders value the advice of advisors and benefit from their input to future planning.

Leaders have also received valuable support from other local schools in ensuring that assessment is accurate, enabling students to work together across schools. This has also provided training for staff. These links are a very positive step for the school and as a result staff and pupils are feeling increasingly valued.