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6 June 2015

Mr Nigel Hunt
Headteacher
The Bridge School
Chadwick Road
Astmoor Industrial Estate
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 1PW

Dear Mr Hunt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Bridge School, Halton

Following my visit to your school on 5 June 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 January 2015. 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 are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- undertake an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved
- sharpen the action plan so that leaders' actions can be evaluated in terms of their impact on students' outcomes
- ensure robust systems are in place to manage effectively the significant number of newly appointed staff so that no time is wasted in the drive to move to good.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, students, the Chair of the Management Committee and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated. I also took the opportunity to visit classrooms to observe learning and look at students' work, I spoke with staff and scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school.

Context

The period of significant reorganisation, detailed at the last inspection, has continued. At present almost all teachers and students' keyworkers remain employed on temporary contracts. However, action taken by leaders to recruit experienced staff on permanent contracts is beginning to stabilise the school. Three support staff, on temporary contracts at the time of the inspection, have been given permanent contracts. All teaching assistants' contracts have been converted to permanent positions. Also 2 additional teaching assistants along with a head of student welfare have been employed on a permanent basis. A number of additional appointments have been made to replace temporary agency staff with teachers employed on permanent contracts with effect from September 2015. These include: English teacher; deputy headteacher; assistant headteacher; Key Stage 3 nurture group teacher. A newly appointed mathematics teacher will take up his post during June 2015.

Main findings

The headteacher has remained stoic in his determination to raise the quality of teaching as a means of improving students' outcomes. Leaders have taken swift action to weed out weak teaching. Teachers employed since the inspection have risen to the challenge. Leaders' records, along with my observations during my visits to classrooms, show that whole school policies, such as the marking policy, are applied consistently well. Furthermore, teachers set work which is matched well to the specific needs of students more frequently than before the inspection.

Training for teachers, delivered by leaders, in how to plan lessons which engage all students has been embraced by teachers. Work in students' English exercise books shows that many students write for longer than they did before the inspection, because they are more interested in the topics they are writing about. In one example a student had written about life in World War 1, this student had improved her work by adding words, along with accurately punctuated lists, which made her letter even more interesting.

Teaching in mathematics has improved since the inspection because the mathematics teacher has applied systematically the whole school marking policy. The teacher's feedback to students includes written comments about what they have

done well and how they can reach the next level. Evidence in students' work books shows that students, on the whole, now take more pride in their mathematics work, compared to before the inspection. Many students' work books also show an increased rate of progress since the inspection because students have increased their effort to improve on their work from one lesson to the next. This is also a sign that students' attitudes to learning have improved since the inspection.

Leaders have taken swift action to improve the curriculum. New personal, social and health education and citizenship policies have been introduced by leaders. School records, along with numerous displays on the walls in classrooms and on corridors around the school, demonstrate that students' opportunities to discuss and consider a broad range of relevant topics have been extended. Examples such as students' involvement with 'Social Sense', a joint NHS and social care initiative to support teenagers in making informed behavioural choices, along with the fire and rescue service's water safety campaign, are green shoots of improvement compared to before the inspection.

Students' attendance overall is beginning to show signs of improvement. The head of student welfare, along with a key worker team, has raised the profile of improving students' attendance across the school. Improved relationships between adults and students, along with reported improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, are leading to more students enjoying their time at school. Consequently, the school's own data show that attendance this year has improved by 20 % compared to a similar period last year.

Although the management committee has taken a more active role in holding the school to account, compared to before the inspection, this is not enough. Visits to school by governors, so that they can begin to judge for themselves how well the school is progressing, are not systematic and not focused well enough on how leaders actions impact on students' outcomes. Governors have not yet commissioned an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Leaders have worked effectively with the local authority during the period of significant reorganisation. Leaders have used well the advice and support of key personnel such as the local authority finance and human resources teams, along with the school improvement service, to ensure planned changes to strengthen the school have remained on track.

Strong links with other outstanding schools are beginning to be established. Leaders have made good use of the expertise of a small number of governors who are also

leaders of other schools. Consequently, leaders have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching across the school and also have begun to put in place a robust system to monitor teachers' performance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Management Committee, the Director of Children's Services for Halton and as below.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Management Committee
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy