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30 June 2015

Mrs Nicki Henderson
The Head of School
River Mead School
Lowbourn
Melksham
Wiltshire
SN12 7ED

Dear Mrs Henderson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of River Mead School

Following my visit to your school on 29 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2015. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of the Mead Academy Trust, and the Director of Children's Services for Wiltshire.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching to enable pupils to make faster progress and raise their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teachers make accurate checks on pupils' progress and use these to identify what they need to learn next to improve
 - learning is appropriately matched to pupils' ability in order to increase the progress they make
 - the recent improvements to attitudes to learning are reinforced to make sure that all pupils take a keen interest in their work
 - pupils have opportunities to respond to consistently high-quality marking and feedback that are specific, accurate and clear, and help them to improve
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that subject leaders:
 - communicate high expectations and ambition for their areas of leadership
 - implement improvements to enrich provision and speed up pupils' learning
 - have a thorough understanding of pupils' progress in their subjects and use this information to secure concerted and effective improvement
 - check carefully the effectiveness of new initiatives within agreed timescales to quicken the pace of improvement
- Embed and sustain senior leaders' checks on the progress and achievement of different groups of pupils, particularly those supported through additional funding, and ensure that resources are used effectively to help pupils to make good progress.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 29 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the head of school, the executive headteacher (and representative of the Mead Academy Trust), the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, the deputy headteacher and two other members of staff. The inspector also met with a group of pupils and observed four lessons jointly with the headteacher.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, six new members of staff have been appointed to replace six current teachers who are leaving. The staffing structure has been reorganised in order to provide more effective support for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and disabilities.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

It is clear that senior leaders are strengthening the drive for improvement in all the areas identified as weaknesses in the section 5 inspection. As a result, staff are now very clear about what is required to ensure pupils make more rapid progress in their learning. All teachers now use accurate and more detailed assessment information to help them plan lessons. Lesson plans focus rigorously on the learning that pupils of all abilities are expected to master. The rigour of target setting has improved significantly so that all staff and governors understand how leaders will address any underperformance and missed goals.

A revised staffing structure is being applied. One consequence of this is that the leadership of the school's provision for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities has been strengthened considerably.

Subject leaders are much more confident in their leadership roles as a consequence of good leadership training and the sharing of effective practice with teachers from other trust schools. Teachers are trained more rigorously than previously to improve their effectiveness in the classroom. A consequence of these improvements has been the rapid improvement in pupils' progress since the last section 5 inspection. Although there are still some gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and their peers, these gaps are closing. The most able pupils achieve well.

The governing body continues to sharpen its analyses of performance information. They understand better how new approaches and initiatives help to bring about required improvements. The regular review of subject leaders' reports helps governors' evaluate the quality of teaching and how well teachers monitor pupils' progress. The strategic improvement plans are also reviewed carefully to ensure key targets are being met.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers' use of assessment information continues to improve, and teacher assessments are now accurate and detailed.
- The focus on improving pupils' attitudes to learning has resulted in pupils being much more engaged in their own learning and with a better understanding of how they can improve their work.
- Subject leaders have benefited from good leadership training and are now much more skilful in developing the processes essential for keeping their subjects under review and evaluating the impact of their work.
- The policy of enabling some teaching assistants to move with their year groups has strengthened the provision for pupils when they move through the school.
- The policy of enabling secondary school teachers to work with Year 6 pupils towards the end of Key Stage 2 has also improved the transition process to secondary schools.
- Teachers are used as mentors for new members of staff and this is helping to ensure the induction and training of new staff is effective

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Some leaders do not undertake reviews and evaluations as well as others, which accounts for some subject plans being less rigorous and analytical than others.
- Not all teachers' marking in books is clear enough for pupils to follow or understand. Pupils confirmed this when they said they sometimes could not read or understand the words used by teachers.
- The changes to staffing have not fully taken place yet, and the quality of current teaching remains variable. Leaders are acutely aware that the induction of new staff has to be rigorous enough to ensure that the current rate of improvement does not falter from September.
- The process by which all teachers monitor and evaluate the impact of additional support for pupils is not undertaken consistently well or accurately enough.

External support

The good links with other schools within the trust is helping River Mead rapidly develop its approaches and strategies to improving learning and achievement. The local authority continues to provide much valued reviews of progress. Governors and leaders appreciate the high-level challenge and appropriate support local authority reports and guidance provide.