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15 December 2015

Mrs N Cunningham
Heathfield Special School
Oldbury Way
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Hampshire
PO14 3BN

Dear Mrs Cunningham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heathfield Special School.

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 18 November 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 June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, two assistant headteachers, the subject leader for English, a representative of the local authority and a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. During one of my meetings with an assistant headteacher, I reviewed assessment information about the achievement of pupils. I completed short visits to classrooms with you, during which we discussed what leaders have been doing to improve teaching. I evaluated the school improvement plan, information about leaders' checks on teaching, reports provided by the local authority and documentation about the work of the governing body.

Main findings

You and your assistant headteachers have prioritised improving the quality of teaching and learning. However, not enough has been done to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management. Too many leaders are not equipped with the skills and experience that are needed to bring about rapid and sustainable improvements.

The effectiveness of the governing body remains weak. Governors are not holding leaders sufficiently to account to bring about improvements at the rate that is needed. Furthermore, there remain divisions among leaders about how to tackle key weaknesses in leadership and management.

Senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning are not effective enough. They undertake a range of activities, but these are not sufficiently well organised or focused sharply enough on the achievement of pupils. This means that leaders are not adequately placed to identify accurately where their work is making the necessary difference and where more work is needed.

Middle leadership remains underdeveloped. The work of the mathematics and English leaders has rightly been given a higher profile. They are beginning to contribute to checks on teaching, but are yet to be able to demonstrate the impact of their work on learning. Not enough has been done to develop the roles of leaders of subjects beyond English and mathematics.

The work leaders have undertaken to improve teaching and learning has started to make a difference. Teachers are now planning activities that link well to clear learning intentions. Outdoor learning opportunities reflect the learning that is taking place within the classrooms.

The teaching of mathematics is now more structured and better supports learning. Teaching assistants are clear about their roles within lessons and are monitoring more effectively how well pupils are learning. This has helped to ensure that misconceptions are tackled in a timely manner and there is greater challenge for more-able pupils.

There remains more to do to ensure that the legacy of historical weaknesses is tackled. For example, pupils are not always well monitored by staff when using information technology for their learning and time is wasted.

Leaders have raised the profile of reading in the curriculum effectively, but there is still more work to do. Pupils are encouraged to read in a range of contexts. For example, they are regularly given the opportunity to read one-to-one with an adult. Leaders have appropriately supported parents in giving more opportunities for pupils to read at home. Reading areas are rightly given a high profile in every classroom, as well as in several outdoor learning spaces. However, teachers do not make the

most of all possible opportunities to use books across the curriculum to engage pupils and instil a love of reading.

The development plan you have written is not clear enough about what leaders will do to build on and sustain the initial improvements made to teaching. There is too little detail about what strategies will be used to improve the skills and experience of leaders at all levels. Nor is it clear how the impact of your actions will be measured over time.

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

Your and other leaders' use of external support has been varied. Local authority advisers have provided useful challenge. At times, leaders have acted positively to improve what they are doing, such as to the quality of teaching. However, there have been occasions when advice has not been acted upon quickly enough. For example, the review of governance has highlighted the need for governors to take on more responsibility for evaluating the quality of provision. This has led to a clear plan for how governors can improve their effectiveness, but has not yet resulted in improved monitoring by the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector