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Mrs Denise Williams
Headteacher
West Gate School
Glenfield Road
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Dear Mrs Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to West Gate School

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 2016, 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 April 2016. 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.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments by moderating pupils' work more frequently
- develop the roles of middle leaders to ensure that teachers' assessments are more accurate
- ensure that the targets within the education, health and care plans or statements for special educational needs are incorporated into the pupils' learning
- ensure that the targets set for pupils who are looked after by the local authority are more specific and measurable

- make sure the governing body hold senior leaders to account for the progress that pupils are making.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, a middle leader, a behaviour mentor, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school development plan. We visited some classrooms and looked at pupils' work. I reviewed information related to governance, behaviour, pupils looked after, that is by the local authority, and the safeguarding of pupils.

Context

One teacher and six teaching assistants left the school at the end of the summer term. Five more teachers are due to leave at the end of the current term. Four teachers are currently on maternity leave, including a middle leader. Four members of staff are currently suspended. Two middle leaders have resigned their position. You have appointed two new middle leaders.

Main findings

The headteacher has raised the expectations of teachers and consequently the quality of teaching is beginning to improve. She is visible around the school and is sharing her passion and enthusiasm for learning. However, the headteacher has had to manage significant issues related to staffing, as well as complying with the recommendations from the health and safety executive following a critical incident in January 2016. This has reduced the capacity of the senior leadership team to take effective action following the section 5 inspection in April 2016. The staff structure has now been approved and all the requirements made by the health and safety executive have been met.

You and your leaders have written a school development plan which lists the actions required to tackle the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. Leaders have proposed a new leadership structure which clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all staff. However, this structure has not been fully implemented. For example, the middle leaders do not start in their new posts until January 2017 and therefore have not yet made an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning and assessment.

The deputy headteacher has led training for staff on how to accurately assess pupils' work. This has led to some teachers downgrading previous assessments on pupils' work because some teachers have been over-generous. Consequently, it is difficult for teachers and leaders to judge how much progress pupils have made recently, because their starting points were incorrect.

Moreover, leaders have not put in place enough moderation activities for teachers to check if their assessments are accurate. The absence of middle leaders to support moderation and to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments has meant that leaders cannot be confident that current assessments are accurate.

The school does moderate work with other special schools once a term. At the most recent moderation event, one piece of work was judged to have been assessed accurately by teachers from the other schools, and one assessment was judged to be over-generous.

The school does not have a whole-school assessment system. This means that the assessment practice of teachers differs and makes the tracking of pupils' progress more difficult between the key stages. This makes it more difficult to accurately judge the progress that pupils make.

The deputy headteacher has also led training for teachers on how to use the information in pupils' statements for special educational needs or education, health and care plans to inform their planning for pupils' learning. However, there is no evidence of the impact of this work, apart from in the early years.

In the early years, the leader has established a play and communication programme which has explicit links to targets from the children's education, health and care plans. The adults conduct regular observations of the children's learning to ensure that their judgements are accurate. Leaders are planning to share this good practice.

Through their lesson observations, the leaders have seen an improvement in the quality of teaching. Pupils' progress during the lessons has been in evidence. In addition, leaders have observed at different times of the school day to ensure that time is being used efficiently. During my short visits to a range of lessons, teachers used the time in lessons efficiently. However, it is more difficult for leaders to judge if the quality of teaching is improving pupils' progress more rapidly because of the inconsistency in the teachers' assessments.

There has been a significant improvement in the pupils' behaviour. One of the assistant headteachers and the behaviour mentor have successfully led training for staff to make them aware of a wider choice of options that they can use to improve the pupils' behaviour. The staff have been innovative to meet the individual behavioural needs of pupils. In addition, the staff have helped the pupils to become more aware of their own emotions so they can start to self-regulate their behaviour. Consequently, many pupils now request to move to a calmer environment when they start to feel unsettled.

The number of incidents of poor behaviour have almost halved in a year. Leaders analyse patterns of behaviour regularly and there has been a consistent decrease in

the number of incidents.

Pupils who are looked after attend the school regularly. The school has adapted the curriculum to meet their social and emotional needs. Most of these pupils attend a local farm where they participate in work around the farm. This has boosted the pupils' self-esteem. The pupils are keen to share their work with their peers when they return to the school.

The personal education plans for pupils looked after do not contain precise learning targets to ensure that the teachers are meeting the needs of the pupils. The targets are too broad and cannot be measured accurately. Consequently, the progress that pupils make cannot be assessed accurately.

The governing body have not held leaders to account well enough following the last inspection. There are currently three vacancies on the governing body, which has reduced the capacity for governors to monitor how well the school is performing. Consequently, there have only been two governor visits to the school to check how well leaders are improving teaching and learning following the last inspection.

Furthermore, the minutes from the last two governing body meetings do not show any challenge to the school leaders. The governors have not requested an annual report from the designated leader for the provision for pupils looked after. They have not set a new date for the setting of the headteacher's performance management targets, which should be set before the end of 2016. The governors have not checked closely enough on the progress leaders have been making towards the areas for improvement set out at the last inspection.

External support

The local authority has not provided or brokered enough support to enable the school to move forward at a rapid pace. Their own recent assessment of the school's performance concluded that the school is unlikely to be judged good at the next inspection.

The associate adviser has put together a single plan to coordinate the support the local authority is providing. However, the local authority has not checked well enough on how senior leaders are implementing improvements. In particular, how leaders are improving the assessments made by teachers to ensure that pupils are making good progress.

The local authority has conducted the review of governance. This has taken too long. The school received the review at the end of October 2016, six months after the last inspection. The delay has partly been due to the unavailability of governors to meet with the reviewer. The local authority and the governing body are not due to meet until 10 January 2017 to discuss an action plan following the review. Consequently, the ability of governors to effectively hold senior leaders to account

has not developed well enough.

The school has brokered support from the local authority human resources department to help them with issues related to staffing.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Leicester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch

Her Majesty's Inspector