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Mr N Sellars
Gosford Hill School
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Dear Mr Sellars

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gosford Hill School

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 2017, 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 February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that teaching and achievement in science improve quickly
- sharpen the way work to improve teaching is evaluated to secure an incisive understanding of how effective it is and where adjustments are needed
- use the information you collect about pupils' achievement to gain a precise view of the progress pupils that make from varying starting points, including the most able.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, together with seniors leaders, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised other documents, including information about pupils' achievement. We observed

science teaching in key stage 3 and I met with leaders responsible for science. I also met with leaders responsible for the provision of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities together with leaders who have coordinated support for disadvantaged pupils. Additionally, I held a telephone discussion with your school improvement adviser.

Context

You joined the school as headteacher in April 2016. The chair and vice-chair of governors resigned in July 2016. An acting chair and vice-chair were appointed and their posts became permanent in December 2016. New heads of English and the sixth form took up post in September 2016, their predecessors having left in the summer. The head of science left at the end of December. Interviews for the new head of science take place next week. Several other staff have left and been replaced since the last inspection. The school is fully staffed with specialist teachers.

Main findings

Since taking up post, you have taken swift and decisive action to improve the school. You have successfully stabilised the staff team, showing insight and skill in attracting and recruiting new staff. Your clarity of expectation and focus on shared learning has galvanised the staff into a team that increasingly pulls together for the benefit of the pupils.

You have tightened methods for holding leaders to account. Leadership roles have been clarified. Recently introduced regular meetings between senior and middle leaders create improved opportunities for support and challenge. Your planning and evaluation document, the 'MIPC', is a useful tool against which leaders' actions to raise achievement can be judged. Governors, leaders and teachers now have at hand information about pupils' achievement in each year group and subject, including that of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, the school is much better placed than previously to tackle areas of weakness. Nevertheless, although much improved, the reports that you and governors view about pupils' achievement do not provide the information you need about how well groups of pupils are achieving from their different starting points. Neither do they inform you whether pupils' progress is stronger since the start of September than previously.

Much suitable work is under way to improve teaching. However, leaders do not have an incisive understanding of the effectiveness of this work. This is because, although leaders regularly collect useful information about the quality of teaching, they do not pull this together to gain a really sharp overview of how quickly it is improving. Furthermore, the MIPC does not define consistently clearly the manner in which teaching will have improved by key points in time. Teaching in science still requires significant attention. Improved curriculum plans and new approaches to assessment provide the relatively inexperienced team with a helpful baseline for their teaching. However, the level of challenge defined in the plans is not routinely

high enough to ensure that pupils, and the most able in particular, make strong progress from their differing starting points.

Work to improve leadership and support for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities is making a difference. Leaders of this work have been brought together into one team to ensure a 'joined-up' approach. Leaders maintain a precise understanding of the exact impact of the support provided for such pupils. Increased support outside of lessons, coupled with teaching more sharply focused on meeting the needs of these pupils, is leading to much-improved progress in English and mathematics at key stage 3. Nevertheless, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special education needs are not consistently making the strong progress needed to catch up from a legacy of underachievement, particularly at key stage 4.

The governing body has reviewed the way it operates in order to ensure clarity about its role and a suitably strategic focus. Governors are making good use of the improved information they now receive to gain a much better understanding of the impact of leaders' work to improve the school. A clear approach is now in place which defines the processes and structure by which governors will hold senior and middle leaders to account. Encouragingly, a test run of this approach has proved successful. Governors are increasingly well placed to provide leaders with suitable support and challenge.

External support

You have made some good use of external support in moving the school forward. Nationally recognised training has helped to ensure that governors are increasingly strategic and effective. An independent improvement adviser has proved a useful point of reference for you. Subject leaders have benefited from attending conferences where good practice is shared. Nevertheless, external support still remains somewhat limited. You recognise the need to develop your links with good or outstanding schools. You also recognise the importance of ensuring that suitable support is brought in to quicken improvements in science.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector