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Mr Barry Symons
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Dear Mr Symons

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oaklands School

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 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 January 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that governors receive the information needed to gain an incisive view of the strength of pupils' progress from their different starting points, including the most able
- define the impact that leaders' actions to improve the school should have by key points in the year so that the extent to which the school is on track to reach its longer-term goals can be sharply evaluated.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and two other governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised other documents, including information about pupils' achievement. We visited lessons to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. I also met with a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection, new phase leader roles have been introduced. A senior leader joined the school in September 2016, taking up the new role of assistant headteacher for inclusion. In the same month, the chair of governors resigned and the current chair was elected. Five other governors were also appointed, replacing governors who left at the end of the summer term. Five teachers, three of them temporary, also left. They were replaced by permanent teachers.

Main findings

You have strengthened leadership and improved management arrangements to sharpen the way staff are held to account and ensure a tight ship. The introduction of an assistant headteacher with oversight of inclusion has enabled a better focus on improving provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers are being challenged to adapt and improve their teaching so that these pupils make good progress in lessons. You have reviewed the way you deploy teaching assistants (mentors), to improve the effectiveness of their work. Each mentor now takes responsibility for a group of pupils who need support within a phase or subject, including disadvantaged pupils. As a result, staff are clearer about their roles and have a heightened sense of responsibility. Leaders carefully monitor and review the effectiveness of this extra support to make sure that it is working. Phase leaders are playing an increasingly pivotal role in checking the quality of teaching and holding teachers to account for pupils' progress. You have set up weekly meetings between senior leaders and phase leaders to ensure that areas for attention are picked up and tackled quickly. On the administrative front, you have clarified routines so that nothing slips through the net. Clear, written procedures are now in place for all administrative procedures from following up on pupil absence to obtaining references.

You have set clear expectations for what effective teaching should look like at Oaklands. You have tended to teachers' development to help ensure that teaching meets the school's requirements. Suitable training and opportunities for staff to learn from the strongest practitioners in the school along with more intensive support for teachers who need it have all contributed. During our visits to classes, we saw teachers following your expectations to the letter. Teachers shared the learning intention for the lesson with the pupils. Descriptions of what would count

as success for pupils of different abilities, known as the 'success criteria', were on display for pupils to refer to. Typically, pupils were engaged in the tasks set and teaching assistants were providing helpful support. However, in the main, there was a mismatch between the stated intention of the lesson, the activity and the success criteria. As a result, your intention that teaching should enable pupils to focus sharply on their learning, recognising their successes and next steps, was somewhat lost. Additionally, in some instances, teachers' expectations were not high enough. You reflected that, as middle leaders had not picked up these weaknesses in planning, this indicates that middle leadership still requires some further development.

You have set up a suitable method for collecting and analysing information about pupils' achievement. This enables you to see the extent to which teaching across the school is helping pupils to reach and exceed the standards expected for their age, in English and mathematics. This information indicates that achievement is improving. You have also introduced a new way of analysing and reporting on pupils' progress. However, this does not give you the incisive information that you and the governors need about how well different groups of pupils are achieving in relation to their starting points.

Leaders are using a range of effective strategies to improve attendance and behaviour. This includes clearer communication with parents about the importance of good attendance and increased use of attendance clinics. Running these clinics jointly with a local authority officer gives your message more weight. As a result, the proportion of pupils with poor attendance has dropped by a third this year and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved. Leaders are gaining parents' trust in the way behaviour in the school is managed. Most parents now have confidence in your approach. Leaders are paying better attention to trends in individual pupils' behaviour over time, to ensure a proportionate response. Good behaviour is celebrated. Pupils who behave consistently well from Monday to Friday now take home a 'green all week card'. You have ramped up your approach to ensuring that pupils understand how to stay safe online. Regular reminders and displays in each class help to ensure that pupils' understanding is sound. Rightly, you are considering ways to strengthen parents' understanding of how to protect their children from the risks that pupils might face from misuse of social media, outside of school.

The governors have responded well to the recommendations of the external review of governance. The chair of governors is making sure that all governors understand their role and get the training needed to do the job well. The improved information you provide is helping them to gain a more accurate view of pupils' performance and to ask increasingly challenging questions. However, the school improvement plan is not a sharp tool for driving improvement. The plan does not define the impact that leaders' actions should have at key points on the journey to becoming a good school. As a result, governors are not well placed to hold you to account for the success of your actions in the short to medium term.

External support

You are making good use of helpful support. A range of external reviews, including one on the use of pupil premium funding, have helped you to verify your self-evaluation and hone in on areas for improvement. You meet regularly with your assigned local authority officer, to review progress and identify where you can get further support when needed. You value her support and the coaching that she has provided to middle leaders, which has helped them to grow into their roles.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton

Her Majesty's Inspector