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Debra Smith
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Dear Mrs Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Harbour School

Following my visit to your school on 27 June 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 December 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:

- ensure that staff take full responsibility for improving reading and writing in English and in other subjects of the curriculum
- develop the role of middle leaders so that teaching and learning improve rapidly.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders. I met the leader for numeracy and key stage 4. The deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher accompanied me on a tour of the school. We made short visits to classrooms. I

spoke to some pupils and observed them undertaking a range of activities. I spoke to a representative from the local authority and to the chair of the governing body. I evaluated a number of documents, including the school development plan, the pupil premium action plan, the school's self-evaluation, your updated information on pupils' progress and the minutes of meetings of the governing body.

Context

The subject leader for English has been absent and is leaving the school. Governors are seeking to appoint subject leaders in key stage 3 for design and technology and English.

Main findings

You are working relentlessly with the support of senior leaders to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Staff are working hard to make the quality of teaching and the accuracy of their assessment more effective, to raise standards. Teachers are learning about best practice as a result of your observations. The support of local authority advisers is also making a difference to the provision and to teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.

The subject leader for mathematics is rightly proud of the difference that staff are making to pupils' progress and attitudes to learning. Successes include:

- better application of numeracy skills across subjects
- more practical and relevant activities to encourage pupils to do well
- a new scheme, used consistently, to teach mathematics at key stage 2
- improved effectiveness of the support of additional adults in the class.

In a mathematics lesson, one pupil told the inspector that he was very keen to complete his addition calculation because he liked fishing and he was adding the weight of his fish.

These positive developments are not yet happening consistently in English and literacy. Staff are not taking sufficient responsibility for improving the quality of reading and writing in their class or across subjects. Some writing activities are engaging pupils because they build on their daily experiences, such as writing to explain the purpose of the school's tea-and-toast sessions.

You have worked very efficiently to plan better provision for students at key stage 4. The links with the local college are making a positive difference to pupils' attendance and to their academic and personal development. It was not possible to speak to parents and key stage 4 pupils during this visit, but you have recorded that parents are complimentary about the school's work in this area. Pupils are very proud to attend college and all have a place to join Year 12 in September 2017.

Behaviour is much improved. One pupil told me that behaviour is 'now better and the school is less mental'. You ensure that the policy and procedures to manage challenging behaviour are applied more consistently through the 'Harbour Steps' programme. The strategies to prevent poor behaviour and act on pupils' views and feelings are working well. Staff actively model positive attitudes to work and achievement. Classroom displays support pupils' learning and promote good behaviour. The Bridge facility, a safe area for pupils to access support at time of crisis, has undergone significant refurbishment. It offers a more attractive learning environment. Pupils contributed by choosing their preferred colour scheme for the room. I observed them working calmly on a structured programme of social activities to learn how to make friends.

The school's development plan incorporates the recommendations made at the time of the section 5 inspection and gives the right priority to them. The pace of change is appropriate in almost all areas. You are working hard to improve the school's website and to ensure that it meets requirements. You acknowledge that more work is required to improve the key stage 3 curriculum. Middle leaders are not yet contributing enough to improving teaching, learning and assessment. They need to support the work of senior leaders more closely to make the school's assessment and target setting process even more effective.

Members of the governing body are tackling weaknesses with determination. As identified at the time of the section 5 inspection, governors have a precise understanding of the quality of the school's provision. They check on the actions that you and other leaders are taking to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. The chair of the governing body acknowledges that the effectiveness of middle leadership needs to speed up. An external review of the use of the pupil premium was recommended at the section 5 inspection. This review has not taken place yet but it is booked for September 2017.

Safeguarding procedures continue to be effective. During this monitoring visit, we discussed the additional work that you have carried out to reduce the need for physical intervention and to improve attendance. Staff are frequently updated about safeguarding concerns and training is readily available. You maintain robust systems and processes to ensure pupils' safety and to promote their welfare.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.²

External support

The school is drawing well on external support. The advisers from the local authority keep a close eye on improvement and help staff to improve their practice. You respond well to any external evaluation of the quality of the school's provision and outcomes. The governing body has ensured that funds are available to pay for

the services of a school improvement partner to check progress against your key priorities.

You are developing links with other schools. This enables staff to reflect on their practice and check the accuracy of their assessment of pupils' progress. The amount of external support is managed well so that staff do not feel overloaded or confused by inconsistent advice. The partnership with Cambridge Regional College is particularly strong.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé

Her Majesty's Inspector