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Mr John Bird
Oakfield Lodge School
Warmingham Road
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Dear Mr Bird

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oakfield Lodge School

Following my visit to your school on 22 September 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 March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the interim executive board 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:

- establish an accurate, up-to-date evaluation of the school's performance which is shared with the interim executive board, senior leaders and staff
- develop plans which set out clear, measurable targets so that the interim executive board, senior leaders and staff are in no doubt what actions need to be taken
- ensure that the interim executive board monitor the progress of actions set out in the school's plans and make sure that key milestones are met
- make sure that the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection are incorporated into the school's plans
- take urgent action to ensure that teachers' assessments are reliable and targets set for pupils are suitably challenging

- use pupil performance information well so that pupils make the progress of which they are capable and teachers are held to account robustly for pupils' performance.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher as well as a group of teachers. I also met with the chair and a member of the interim executive board. I spoke with a representative of the local authority. During the day, I visited classes to observe pupils at work and looked at some of their work. I met formally with a group of pupils as well as two parents. I considered a range of evidence provided by the school, including the school's draft self-evaluation summary and most recent pupil performance information.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection there have been a number of changes in the school's leadership. The interim executive board is in the process of recruiting a substantive headteacher. An interim headteacher has been appointed for the autumn term following the departure of the previous headteacher. The school's science teacher was appointed as the deputy headteacher last week. One member of the interim executive board has stepped down.

There has been considerable turbulence in staffing. A number of current staff are temporary, either working on a supply basis or employed on short-term contracts. The school is housed in temporary accommodation. Plans for a new building have not yet been realised. The plans for the school to convert to an academy have been delayed. The interim executive board is working with the local authority and the local multi-academy trust to move these plans forward.

Main findings

The frequent changes of headteacher since the section 5 inspection have hampered the school's rate of improvement. Although some aspects of the school's performance have improved, for example pupils' attitudes to learning, too many of the areas for improvement have not yet been sorted out.

Despite the interim executive board's frustration with the slow rate of improvement, they are adamant that their desire to appoint the right headteacher for the school must remain their top priority. The interim executive board have refused to compromise their vision for the school as they continue to look for strong leaders who will secure the school's long-term success. They are confident that the appointment of the substantive deputy headteacher is a step in the right direction.

The interim executive board, senior leaders, staff and pupils agree that the departure of the headteacher and another member of staff towards the end of last

term unsettled them all. Staff applaud the efforts of the new deputy headteacher to keep the school, its staff and pupils on an 'even keel' through those difficult days. As one colleague said, 'she was the glue which held us together'. The deputy headteacher made sure that the improvements in behaviour, attendance, teaching and learning were maintained during the transition to the new leadership team. Over the summer holidays, she worked hard to ensure that you were well briefed about the school. Moreover, when school opened in September, staff and pupils were reassured when the deputy headteacher made it clear that 'it was business as usual'.

Over the past academic year, the previous headteacher implemented a number of changes which put the school on a stronger footing. Staff and pupils agree that these changes made the school a much better place to work and study than at the time of the section 5 inspection. The previous headteacher prioritised improving staff and pupil relationships. Now pupils trust and respect the adults they work with. In return, adults take time to listen to pupils and are consistent in their much higher expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils are keen to do their best to earn the praise of teachers and support staff. Pupils told me how they do not shy away from challenging any of their peers who do not treat adults appropriately. Most pupils like coming to school now. In fact, as one pupil's parents told me, some go the extra mile, walking or cycling long distances in all weathers to get to school.

Teachers and support staff took on board the advice and guidance they have received over the past 12 months from previous senior leaders. This has led to some improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Pupils have a more positive attitude to learning. Both the quality and quantity of the work pupils produce has improved. Pupils say that the quality of teaching has improved. They describe lessons as more interesting and engaging. Pupils talk about the increasing levels of challenge in the work their teachers set them and the high expectations for what they must compete within each lesson. Pupils' books as well as work on classroom walls testify to the dialogue between teachers and pupils about learning as well as the pride pupils now take in their work.

However, teachers have been frustrated by the limited opportunities to attend training outside the school. Subject specialist teachers want to collaborate with colleagues in local schools to develop further their knowledge, skills and experience. This lack of collaborative working is presenting a particular challenge when teachers are assessing pupils' work. Lack of external moderation means that teachers cannot be confident that their judgements are accurate. Consequently, while leaders have been collecting information about pupils' attainment and progress on a half-termly basis, no one can be confident that this information is reliable. You and the interim executive board intend to establish partnerships with local schools as a matter of urgency. Teachers and support staff are heartened by this shift. They are looking forward to the benefits this outward-facing culture will bring, both to themselves and to their pupils.

The improvements made by the previous senior leaders have reaped some rewards. Last year, more Year 11 pupils than ever before were entered for external examinations. These pupils achieved the school's best results by a long way and for those pupils for whom the school has information, they have moved on to education, employment or training. In addition, the highest numbers of pupils in recent years were reintegrated into mainstream school over the past 12 months. Leaders and staff are delighted by these successes but are not complacent. Leaders and staff know that there is still much room for improvement. Leaders are looking into broadening the curriculum offer for key stage 4 pupils to better meet the wide range of interests, enthusiasm and aptitudes of the pupils who join the school.

Staff talk very positively of the improvements in pupils' attendance. They cite the successful work of the local authority attendance officer in engaging with some of the school's most hard to reach families. Although overall absence has reduced since the section 5 inspection, there are still too many pupils who are persistently absent.

The lack of continuity between successive headteachers since the previous inspection has proved a challenge. You are putting together an up-to-date evaluation of the school's current performance so that a viable action plan can be put in place swiftly. You and the deputy headteacher recognise the importance of the impending transition, to whoever is appointed as the substantive headteacher, being as well managed as possible.

You have started to make some changes. However, you are making sure that you consult with staff and pupils. Although it is early days, pupils are noticing the positive impact of the new behaviour points system. Pupils who spoke to me told me how it had already improved punctuality to lessons.

The interim executive board and local authority continue to work together on plans to provide suitable accommodation and facilities as well as plans for the school to become an academy. Together, the interim executive board and local authority have overcome a number of barriers which have frustrated their plans over the past 18 months. When we met, the interim executive board and local authority were optimistic that these plans are now back on track.

External support

You and the interim executive board talked to me about the challenge faced by the previous lack of willingness to work with external partners. This has slowed the school's rate of improvement. However, there have been some exceptions. Notably, the local authority attendance officer who is deployed to the school is held in high regard by staff. Leaders and teachers agree that he has worked well with families who struggle to get their children to school on time every day.

Following the sudden departure of the previous headteacher, the interim executive

board and local authority worked well together to put in place robust short-term leadership arrangements. Moreover, new leaders worked with the local authority to deliver safeguarding training for all staff at the start of this term to make sure that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities.

The executive headteacher of the local academy trust is now an associate member of the interim executive board. Together, you and this executive headteacher have planned training opportunities for both teaching and support staff across the group of local schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector