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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ms Sara Adams
Headteacher
The Wey Valley School
Dorchester Road
Weymouth
Dorset
DT3 5AN

Dear Ms Adams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Wey Valley School

Following my visit to your school on 5 December 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 September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all staff have the same high expectations of pupils' behaviour, achievement and presentation of work
- ensure that all staff provide pupils with clear feedback, in accordance with the school's policy, that enables them to improve their work and make more rapid progress
- continue to improve attendance, particularly by reducing the persistent absence of pupils from vulnerable groups.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and pupils to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. A telephone conversation took place with the school improvement partner. The school's improvement plan and self-evaluation were considered alongside progress information and reports from external consultants. In addition, I scrutinised pupils' work and undertook a learning walk with the deputy headteacher to observe pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning.

Context

Following a period of time as acting headteacher, you took up the substantive post in September 2016, a few weeks before the previous full inspection. Since that time, the senior leadership team has been restructured. New teaching appointments were made for the beginning of this academic year, including a primary-trained mathematics teacher. In September 2016, a new head of mathematics was appointed. The school is in the process of joining a multi-academy trust and due diligence checks are currently taking place. The school is expected to join the multi-academy trust in June 2018.

Main findings

You have been in post for just over a year. In that time, you have built a united and productive senior team around you. This follows the restructure of senior leadership after the previous inspection. The senior team is now leading the school with purpose and determination because senior leaders know what needs to be done. They have a sense of 'mission'. Consequently, leaders are working hard to confront the areas for improvement highlighted at the last inspection. Although they have come some distance, they acknowledge that there is more work to be done.

Leaders are well supported by governors, who know the school well. Governors are committed to their work and have not shied away from the task of improving the school. They now hold leaders to greater account, receiving comprehensive reports about pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour. They use this information, alongside a detailed understanding of the school's context, the local area and barriers to improvement, to challenge leaders further.

Leaders' actions are improving aspects of teaching. There is now a greater focus on whole-staff professional development, which has enabled staff to share practice and improve teaching quality. For example, a school-wide policy is now in place for staff to provide advice to pupils about how they can improve their work. It is helping pupils to reflect more routinely on how their work might be improved. However, the policy is not applied consistently across subjects and teachers.

Leaders have also prioritised attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. They

understand the link between poor attendance and disadvantaged pupils' poor achievement over time. As a result, leaders are successfully using pupil premium additional funding to tackle this issue in different ways. For example, the funding has paid for a social worker to work with a targeted group of disadvantaged pupils whose attendance is low. This individualised, personal support is improving the attendance of these pupils, but there is further work to do.

The behaviour of pupils is improving because of the implementation of a new system of rewards and sanctions. This new system makes greater demands of pupils and sets higher standards. Some pupils are not in favour of the system because they do not feel that it is consistently applied by staff. Nevertheless, they recognise that behaviour is improving. Exclusions have also risen as the system becomes better established. Leaders rightly argue that these exclusions are necessary to reinforce the commitment to higher expectations of behaviour.

Behaviour is improving but it is not yet good. Some pupils are not wearing their uniform correctly and are not fully focused in lessons. At times, there is too much noise in the corridors during lesson changeover.

Leaders' efforts to improve teaching and behaviour are having a positive effect on the progress of current pupils in most year groups. The school's own information indicates that, although progress is not as strong as it needs to be, it is improving. This information is reinforced by the quality and presentation of work in pupils' books. In some subjects, pupils, particularly the most able, are being challenged to engage with appropriate ideas and concepts. Teachers encourage them in this by setting stimulating activities, consolidating sequences of learning and providing guidance which helps pupils improve their work. However, this is variable across teachers and subjects. Pupils who spoke with me reported that some teachers challenge them to think and work hard, but not all.

Some pupils are not yet taking enough pride in their work; it is scruffy and lacks discipline. For example, pupils do not use their best handwriting or take care to set their work out neatly. Again, this is because some teachers' expectations are not high enough. Leaders are fully aware that raising expectations and increasing consistency are key to taking the school forward. They are making headway, but further work remains.

External support

Leaders are now more 'outward looking' in their approach. They have proactively engaged with external partners to help them improve aspects of the school's work. This external support has helped move the school forward since the time of the previous 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 Dorset. This letter will be

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector