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Austen Hindman
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Dear Mr Hindman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Peacehaven Community School

Following my visit to your school on 27 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- improve attendance, especially of disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, executive headteacher and members of the senior and middle leadership teams to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Telephone conversations were held with members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). I also met with a group of pupils formally, and spoke with others as I visited lessons. Lesson visits were undertaken alongside senior leaders. During these lesson visits I also looked at pupils' books. I examined a range of documentation, including your action plans and evaluations of the school's work.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been changes to the leadership of the school. You have been appointed headteacher on a substantive basis and have re-structured the senior and middle leadership teams. There have been some changes to teaching and support staff.

Main findings

Since the section 5 inspection you have continued to improve the school. Working with the Swale Academies Trust (SAT), who were commissioned by the local authority to support school improvement, you have changed the culture of the school. All staff and pupils I met during my visit reflected your ambition for the school. Pupils and staff alike are enthused by the differences that they can see in the daily work of the school. They described, and I saw, a passion for learning throughout the school.

You have a very accurate view of the school, based on your detailed and routine evaluation of leaders' work and pupils' progress. You have ensured that all your leadership actions are linked closely to school improvement and are clear about the difference that is required in order to achieve your goals. You are aware that there is still work to be done in order to reverse the legacy of underachievement experienced by your older pupils. In particular, you have prioritised improving pupils' attendance so that they are able to benefit from the changes that are evident.

The IEB has been highly effective. Records demonstrate that the members of this board provide a strong level of challenge and support. The team members are experienced and have a background in education. They use this well to moderate and assess the progress that leaders are making. They have ensured that the high expectations for the school are never forgotten.

Making good use of SAT, you and your team have improved the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. This has been achieved through the high-quality professional development alongside the clear structures that you have established. Your high expectations are shared by staff and they understand and welcome the support to improve. The development and training undertaken jointly with other schools in the academy trust has been invaluable, for example enabling subject specialists to collaborate on the development lessons and resources for the new GCSE specifications. Joint moderation and standardisation activities have ensured that teachers across the school are accurate with their assessment of pupils' learning. The lessons I visited were purposeful and pupils could explain what they were learning and why they were learning it. Pupils liked the consistent school approaches to learning, including the 'ACE outcomes' (all, challenge, expert) that are used to help match learning tasks to pupils' prior learning.

I looked at a number of pupils' books and found that these show they have real pride in their work. Pupils were keen to explain their progress to me and they like

the 'data doughnuts' for each subject by which they can track this journey. They find this very useful and motivating. Most of this small sample of pupils' books that I looked at indicate that pupils are making secure progress with their learning.

School information and work in pupils' books suggest that pupils are now making more consistent progress across the curriculum. While the GCSE results of 2017 were not what you had hoped for, they were not a shock due to the curriculum decisions that had been taken prior to your arrival. Current pupils are following a broad and balanced curriculum and are making better progress across the curriculum.

You have made reading and literacy a core component of life at Peacehaven. Everyone, staff and pupils included, is expected to have a book available to read. Pupils I spoke with were enthusiastic about this expectation and liked the way they were able to get recommendations for books from each other. Many of your pupils join the school with reading ages below those typical for their age. The work to help them catch up is effective.

You and your team have ensured that the school is a calm and focused place of learning. Prior to the previous inspection, you and your team undertook a complete review of behaviour and established clear and structured procedures to support pupils' behaviour and learning. The difference that was noted in the previous inspection has been developed further. Pupils were adamant that the school is now a good place to be and that behaviour is now good overall. During my visits to lessons, I saw pupils who were enjoying their learning and behaving well. The school information that you showed me shows a steep reduction in fixed-term exclusions and other sanctions for poor behaviour.

Middle leaders have been supported well through coaching and modelling. This work has been successful and they have developed their skills well. Those I met with displayed strong commitment to improving teaching and raising standards further. They appeared to relish the increased levels of accountability that you have established and are proud of all that has been achieved so far. They share your ambition for the school and use their skills well to hold their teams to account in order to improve outcomes further for pupils.

You and your team are acutely aware that an important issue you now face is that of improving pupils' attendance. This has remained stubbornly low, despite your best efforts. You are determined to improve this aspect and have made it a high priority for all staff.

External support

Leaders have made well-considered use of the external support provided by the local authority and the academy trust commissioned to provide school support. The local authority commissioned the support from the academy trust and continue to monitor

its work closely. The local authority has also provided useful teacher networks and wider leadership support that has proved invaluable.

Swale Academies Trust has provided highly effective support and challenge for leaders at all levels. For example, the professional and curriculum networks have enabled teachers to assure themselves of the accuracy of their assessments. High-quality coaching has also been very successful across the school. It is telling that Peacehaven staff are now able to contribute and provide support and challenge for their partner schools in the trust.

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

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector