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Kevan Wayne-Morris
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Dear Mr Wayne-Morris

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodlands Education Centre

Following my visit to your school on 18 April 2018, 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 October 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and members of the management committee are not 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:

- urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, ensuring that all staff challenge pupils to achieve more, so that they are better prepared for the next stage in their education
- ensure that all staff understand exactly what needs to improve and that they work towards the common purpose and vision for the future
- work effectively with pupils, parents and carers to improve attendance, making better use of the existing system to track pupils' absence.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim deputy headteacher, senior leaders, groups of staff, a representative of the local authority and members of the management committee, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited lessons, accompanied by one of the assistant headteachers, to observe pupils' learning and review their work. A range of documentation, including the school's improvement plans, information provided by the local authority and data related to pupils' performance, was scrutinised.

Context

The headteacher and the chair of the management committee, who were in post at the time of the last inspection, both left the school in February 2017. There were additional changes to the management committee, including the appointment of a new chair. Following the departure of the previous headteacher, there was a period when interim leaders ran the school, including an executive headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, seconded from a school in the local federation. The current headteacher took up his post in January 2018. At the time of this monitoring inspection the headteacher was absent from the school and the school was being led by the interim deputy headteacher. One assistant headteacher has left the school since the last inspection and there have been some changes to the roles and responsibilities of the other two assistant headteachers. There are three staff currently on long-term absence from the school. At the time of this monitoring inspection, there was no attendance officer in post.

Main findings

The school has been through a difficult time since the last inspection. Leaders' response to the last inspection judgement was not urgent enough. They underestimated the scale of the work needed to improve the school and there was not enough concerted action being taken to tackle the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. A series of changes in senior leadership resulted in several 'fresh starts' that have not led to sustained and meaningful improvement. Although staff have coped with the frequent leadership changes, they have not been galvanised to work together to support improvements wholeheartedly. Nor have staff been held to account for their performance until very recently. Consequently, 18 months on from the last inspection, the pace of improvement has been too slow and the school's current performance is not where it needs to be in order to be judged good at the next inspection.

Staff and leaders are clearly dedicated to the pupils they teach and support. Their focus is on forming strong relationships with pupils, caring for their well-being and managing their behaviour. However, some leaders and staff are not ambitious enough. Not all are committed to raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve and, as a result, standards are too low. Some casual approaches and lower

standards linger and have been hard to challenge and improve. The weaknesses identified in teaching, learning and assessment at previous inspections remain.

There have been improvements in the way that pupils are assessed on admission to the school. Parents and pupils rightly value the time that pupils spend in the intervention unit before joining regular lessons. Pupils get off to a good start because time is taken to get to know their interests, ambitions and strengths, and to identify gaps in their learning. Staff carrying out the assessments are skilled and knowledgeable. They provide teachers with useful strategies to support pupils and help them overcome their difficulties with learning. Leaders responsible for improving teaching and learning now expect more from teachers' planning to meet pupils' needs. To support them, teaching staff benefit from a more structured programme of training to help them improve their work, together with more stringent targets for their performance. As a result, teachers work hard to plan lessons and create a range of materials to use with pupils.

However, the recent initiatives to improve teaching have been too superficial. Leaders and staff are not making good enough use of the information gathered from the early assessments to plan for pupils' long-term goals. Teachers do not pay enough attention to the purpose and content of what pupils are learning. Pupils are often given unchallenging short-term tasks to keep them busy. Such tasks generate a greater workload for teachers, but do not encourage pupils to think or work harder. In too many cases, pupils are not able to see what they are aiming for and how it will prepare them for the next phase in their education. In addition, leaders and teachers have not made sure that pupils have opportunities to learn enough about the world outside their own experiences or immediate environment.

The school's strategy for spending the pupil premium funding is not precise enough. Leaders have improved their analysis of how the funding is used. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that there has not been a systematic review of the impact of additional funding, considering the vulnerability of many pupils and their need to catch up.

School leaders have identified a small improvement in pupils' overall attendance, but this is not significant and attendance rates remain unacceptably low. Leaders are not able to point to the difference the school is making to those pupils with a previous history of poor attendance in their mainstream schools. Leaders have introduced a new system which will enable them to track attendance more closely and evaluate the impact of different strategies to encourage pupils to attend well. However, there is no one on the school staff with specific responsibility for using this system to identify what is working and what is not. The school's efforts to work with pupils and families to reduce casual or persistent absence have not proved effective.

School leaders admit that the management of pupils' behaviour is not consistent and that some unacceptable behaviour is not dealt with effectively. The deputy

headteacher honestly acknowledges that there are still 'good days and bad days'. However, during the inspection, pupils tried hard to behave, moderate their language and impulses, take part in lessons and show their best side to their teachers and the inspector. This positive attitude is encouraging and reveals much about pupils' loyalty, desire to learn and their warm attachments to staff. In addition, pupils were seen to be making the most progress when they knew exactly what they were going to be taught and what they will have accomplished by the end of the lesson or topic. In these cases, pupils were confident in their teachers and focused on thinking hard. They asked and answered questions and tried things out on their own without relying on staff to do the work for them.

Although standards are not rising quickly enough, this monitoring inspection found that recent changes have placed the school in a more secure position. The interim deputy headteacher has stabilised the school during the current headteacher's absence and has rightly earned the full support of the management committee. The deputy headteacher is experienced, realistic and practical. She has helped to bring senior leaders together and, during the inspection, staff commented that they felt that leaders were working as a team for the first time. The assistant headteachers carry out their roles with enthusiasm and energy. Their work is beginning to make a positive impact. Pupils are more settled in lessons and willing to learn. Arrangements for their transition back to mainstream schools or college places are managed well. As a result, the school's relationship with other schools in the federation has improved and some trust has been restored.

The management committee has been strengthened considerably with the appointment of a new chair, and the addition of stronger members both from within and outside education. Committee members are astute and experienced; they know precisely what needs to be done to improve the school. Members are beginning to seek the views of parents more systematically, and all are committed to championing the needs and safety of the pupils in the school, including those who are most vulnerable.

External support

The local authority has rightly identified the school as a high priority and has provided strong levels of support. Members of the management committee, together with school leaders, have judiciously prioritised how they use the range of support offered for different curriculum areas and aspects of the school's work. The school's improvement partner visits the school regularly and carries out thorough monitoring, focused on the areas for improvement. Her reports on behaviour, teaching and learning are fair and precise. They clearly identify strengths and small steps of improvement, and also the key weaknesses. The local authority has worked supportively with the school and the federation when there has needed to be leadership changes or further leadership support. Officers are wisely making sure that leaders and staff in the school have opportunities to observe better practice in more successful similar schools. It is positive that the management committee and

local authority are working together productively and with a common sense of purpose and ambition.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector