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3 July 2018

Ms Jacqueline Clearkin
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Dear Ms Clearkin

Short inspection of Heritage House School

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 2018 with Barnaby Geen, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Heritage House has had a challenging few years. In December 2016, the local authority had significant concerns about the leadership and management of the school. As a result, it used its statutory powers to install an interim executive board (IEB). The IEB is now responsible for the governance of the school.

The local authority and IEB are very clear that the school you started to lead in November 2017 was not a good school. They judged that leadership was extremely weak. They felt that the safety and well-being of pupils was not promoted effectively.

You have had a significant positive impact on the school in a short period of time. You have prioritised the safety and well-being of staff and pupils alike. Your dynamic leadership, that puts pupils at the heart of everything, has improved key aspects of the school's work quickly. You have dramatically reduced levels of staff's absence. Staff morale is improving. Almost all staff are behind you in your drive to improve Heritage House.

Heritage House is now a bright and attractive place to learn. Poorly resourced or maintained areas of the school have been improved. All broken or damaged equipment has gone. You have focused on increasing pupils' independence. There is

now consistency across classrooms in how pupils can access interesting and well-maintained and presented resources. You have ensured that symbol cards, which many pupils need to help them communicate their needs and wants, are more readily accessible in all parts of the school.

You have a deep and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. You have made important strides in improving systems and processes to evaluate, record and track pupils' learning and progress. However, you also know that there is more work to do to make sure that all adults are using the new systems effectively. Poor assessment practices, over time, have not helped current pupils make strong progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The IEB and interim leaders have ensured that safeguarding is effective. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have given high prominence to ensuring that staff know what they need to do if they have any concerns regarding pupils' well-being or safety. Records show that staff are trained effectively to watch and to listen to pupils. Consequently, any concerns are recorded carefully in accordance with your expectations. Leaders work well with parents and carers and with other professionals, such as social workers.

Interim leaders and the IEB have valued the local authority's thorough reviews of health and safety and safeguarding practices. You have ensured that all historic shortcomings within the premises have been rectified. Assessments of the risks to vulnerable pupils are clearly considered, recorded and shared. Personalised plans to ensure pupils' safe evacuation of the building, should the need arise, are detailed and displayed.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we evaluated: the effectiveness of safeguarding; the impact of the IEB; the difference that interim leaders have made to the senior school's curriculum; and the effectiveness of the new assessment process in making the curriculum more personalised to the needs of individual pupils.
- The IEB is highly effective. It wasted no time in establishing what needed to improve in the school. Its challenge to substantive school leaders was exemplary. The IEB is well led, knowledgeable and ambitious. It has used the local authority's reports effectively to ensure that the culture regarding pupils' health and safety improved. The IEB has absolute clarity about where the school has been, where it is now and what needs to improve. It works well to support and challenge interim leaders effectively.
- You and other interim leaders were quick to identify shortcomings in the senior school's curriculum. In a short space of time, you have significantly increased the range of meaningful experiences to enhance the independence of the oldest pupils. As a result, pupils are better prepared for life beyond school.
- Your vision and ambition for pupils are clear. The community is more involved in

helping the school. The newly created café space enables older pupils to learn life skills and gain valuable work experience. Pupils are proud of their growing independence. Staff recognise the improvements in pupils' behaviour and the fact that many are less reliant on adults than they were six months ago. Pupils are being given increasing opportunities to make a positive contribution to school life, including helping to improve the physical environment. Pupils are proud of the positive difference they make.

- You have introduced many significant changes to the ways that staff observe and assess pupils' learning. You have clearly identified that, over time, staff have not been effective enough in recognising significant learning when they are teaching pupils. The quality of staff's observations is beginning to improve but, too often, there is a lack of clarity on what new knowledge, skills or understanding pupils are gaining. As a result, too many assessments are not helpful. You have also put professional development for staff in place to improve their evaluations of pupils' expressive communication.
- Previous unreliable or poor assessment information has hampered leaders' ability to evaluate the impact of the quality of teaching on pupils' progress over time. Your new assessment framework is well thought out and clear. The IEB correctly stated that the school's new performance information is the first that has been clear and reliable. Staff are beginning to use the new assessment information to make the curriculum more tailored to pupils' individual needs. However, it is too soon for this development to have had the impact that leaders are ambitious to see. Staff are not yet using assessment information well enough to ensure that planned learning is relevant and not too easy or difficult.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff make better use of the new assessment systems to identify and evaluate pupils' communication, knowledge and skills more effectively
- staff use the new assessment information to design a curriculum that is tailored and adapted to meet pupils' individual needs so that they make strong progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Cole
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The substantive headteacher was not present during the inspection. We met representatives of the IEB and the local authority. We met with you to review your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Senior leaders accompanied us on visits to a number of classes. We evaluated a range of information regarding pupils' progress. We spoke to pupils and staff around the school. We reviewed 36 staff survey returns. We scrutinised seven responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, considered parents' free-text comments and met some parents at the end of the school day. We checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements, including those relating to recruitment.