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Mr Mark Davies
Chief Executive Officer
Bridge Learning Campus
William Jessop Way
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Dear Mr Davies

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Bridge Learning Campus

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you and the leadership team to discuss the progress you have made in the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. I visited lessons with leaders, and scrutinised pupils' written work, across a range of subjects and age groups. I met with representatives from the governing body and had a telephone conversation with the vice-chair of the board of trustees. I spoke with curriculum leaders, pastoral managers, the designated safeguarding lead and pupils. I evaluated the statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have made changes to the leadership team, following the departure of the previous headteacher. You have made the decision to balance your role as chief executive of the trust with providing dedicated leadership for the school. You are well supported by two heads of school, for the primary and the secondary phase. You have made changes to leadership roles to increase

capacity and improve consistency. This more coherent structure facilitates a greater focus on improving the quality of teaching and provides more robust quality assurance. In addition, you have restructured the pastoral team, so that there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities. There have been a number of changes to teaching staff, particularly in the primary phase. You have commissioned external support from within the trust, but also from further afield, to ensure that the plans for improvement are externally validated and targets are sufficiently challenging.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, together with your leadership team, are working with determination and collective purpose to improve the quality of education provided by the school. Leaders and governors are reflective on the findings from the previous inspection report and have aligned priorities accordingly. Your approach has been to carefully determine the strategies that you believe will lead to an improvement in teaching and learning. Training for staff has been provided to support teachers to adapt their approaches to this revised way of working.

Leaders are open and honest about the areas that are not yet where you want them to be. We were in agreement about what we saw during the inspection, which indicates that you are accurate in your reflections of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You are ambitious for your pupils, but understand that there are still significant challenges to overcome, particularly in improving the levels of attendance.

Expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised. The climate at the school is conducive to learning and means that teachers are better able to support pupils to achieve these targets. Crucially, assessments are now accurate, and this means that teachers have a better understanding of how to support pupils to make the progress of which they are capable.

Tighter systems have been introduced to monitor the quality of teaching, and this is improving the consistency with which teachers apply agreed approaches. Staff appreciate that there is a suitable blend of support and challenge and are clear about expectations.

The trust has been proactive in supporting the school to make the changes required. Lines of accountability are outlined, and regular updates are provided to ensure that the school remains on track to achieve targets within the timescales anticipated. Governors' expertise is being developed through appropriate training. This helps them to ask pertinent questions and elicit from leaders the impact of actions, as opposed to a narrative of what has been done. Governors are positive about these changes and visit the school on a regular basis, with clearly defined remits aligned to the statement of action. Thus, governors are able to glean first-hand information about the work of the school.

You have recognised that a key lever for improvement is to develop the role of middle leaders. To this end, you have provided training for subject and phase leaders to develop their expertise. Middle leaders engage in improvement projects that are linked to the areas of priority identified in the school action plan. This allows them to translate theory into practice. This formative approach is appreciated by middle leaders, who feel that they have a better understanding of their role.

Quite rightly, you have initially ensured that newly appointed senior leaders gain an accurate overview of the quality of teaching. You are now in a position to include middle leaders in this process, so that they can demonstrate greater autonomy and provide additional capacity to challenge where standards fall short of expectations. Where middle leadership is not as strong, support is in place.

You are awaiting the report from an external review of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils, recommended at the previous inspection. However, the barriers to learning for pupils have been outlined and funding allocated appropriately. Leaders have evaluated the impact of the interventions, which have achieved a balance between meeting the social, emotional and therapeutic needs of pupils and academic expectations. Teachers are aware of the disadvantaged pupils in their classes, but do not yet have sufficient information about the additional interventions pupils attend.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- Accountability and monitoring systems have been strengthened and leaders have an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is supported by links with other schools that provide an external assessment of the impact of strategies. These links also provide staff with an outside perspective of what pupils can achieve, and this has contributed to the raising of staff expectations. Teachers have been provided with effective support and training to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the accuracy of assessment.
- The quality of teaching is improving. In stronger practice, questioning is used successfully to provoke and develop understanding. Teachers encourage the most able pupils to use subject-specific vocabulary and describe the process of their thinking. They do not accept answers without a clear rationale being articulated by pupils. Where pupils are given the scope to do this, they self-correct, draw on their prior knowledge, and express themselves with clarity.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) complete activities that motivate them. Teachers plan tasks that focus on identifying the sounds that letters represent and crafting letter and sentence formation. As a result, pupils develop independence and stamina in their writing. While attainment and progress are not yet good enough, staff are committed to making the improvements needed and are given the resources and training to help them do so.

- Where teachers are confident in applying the new assessment system, pupils are clear about the areas they need to improve. Evidence in books shows that teachers' skill in using assessment information to promote progress is improving. Pupils say that they are now routinely expected to reflect on and improve the quality of their work, and show pride in their ability to do so.
- The learning environment is positive. The number of fixed-term exclusions and behaviour referrals decreased in the last academic year. Younger pupils welcome visitors to their classes, explaining what they have been doing and showing examples of their work. They talk with enthusiasm about their reading. The most able pupils enjoy being 'reading gladiators', where they extend their enjoyment of reading. Older pupils are polite and willing to share their work, recognising where they have made improvements to their quality of their responses.

Weaknesses in the school's approach to securing improvements

- There are still inconsistencies in teachers' expectations. Not all teachers are confident and competent in applying agreed strategies. In weaker teaching, there is a lack of challenge for the most able, because teachers' questioning does not allow pupils to expand their ideas. Planning is not well matched to pupils' starting points and misconceptions are not corrected, so that pupils can hone their skills before moving on. This limits the progress that pupils make. Where teachers' expectations are not high, or where instructions lack clarity, the quality of presentation of pupils' work is not strong. In these instances, pupils are compliant, but do not show an eagerness for their learning or a secure understanding of what is required.
- Outcomes for 2018 for pupils at the end of both Year 6 and Year 11 have improved, but are still below national expectations. Pupils do not yet make the progress they should, particularly high prior attaining pupils, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. There has been an improvement in the proportion of children in early years who meet the standard expected for their age. Improvement was also evident in the attainment of pupils by the end of Year 2, including the proportion of pupils who demonstrated a higher level of understanding in reading, writing and mathematics. However, outcomes across the school are too variable. Although improving, teaching is not yet good enough to ensure that all pupils achieve well.
- Despite your work to improve attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent, these figures remain too high. In part, this is due to pupils who have complex needs and, where this is the case, suitable support is provided. The revised pastoral structure has meant that stronger systems are in place to monitor and act on absence more robustly. Leaders are aware of vulnerable pupils and their families and are proactive in their approach. They provide incentives, such as through 'attendance champions', to promote the importance of good attendance. There are indications of modest improvement, particularly in the primary phase and for disadvantaged pupils, but attendance is not yet good enough. There is not yet a coherent school approach to support

pupils to catch up with work they have missed.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector