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Mr Christopher Wilson
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilson

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Queensbury School

Following my visit to your school on 29 January 2019, 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 March 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, the senior leadership team, heads of faculty, teachers and a wide range of other school staff. I held telephone conversations with the chair of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative of the school improvement service commissioned by the local authority. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and several versions of the school's post-Ofsted action plan. I visited classes, representative of all year groups including the sixth form, to observe pupils and students working. I reviewed a range of documents including the post-Ofsted action plan, leaders' records evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, assessment information, minutes from IEB meetings, the pupil premium strategy, safeguarding records and school policies.

Context

The substantive headteacher is currently on long-term leave of absence – this has been the case since mid-October 2018. The substantive headteacher was not present during the inspection. You, as interim headteacher with executive powers, took up post towards the end of October 2018. A new head of English was appointed in November 2018 – this is a permanent post.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Following the last inspection, too much time elapsed before leaders took sufficient, meaningful action to address the school's weaknesses. This was partly because of further instability in leadership. But also, initially, leaders took too long to form a plan of action – over a term passed by before priorities were properly established. Furthermore, the original post-Ofsted action plan lacked precision and was not focused adequately enough on outcomes for pupils. Leaders did not ensure that some planned actions were carried out soon enough. For instance, middle leaders were not enrolled on a planned training programme because the start date was missed. These delays have meant that the school is currently behind schedule with implementing improvements, although it is beginning to catch up quickly. Almost without exception, staff commented that there has been a notable transformation in the rate of positive change since November.

Issues regarding low staff morale and the cohesiveness of the leadership team continued for several months after the last inspection. Feedback from a range of staff indicates that leaders had not done enough to restore confidence in staff and raise their moral. You have now taken positive steps to address these issues, such as improving communication between senior leaders and staff. Staff report that, in recent months, morale has noticeably improved. This was reflected in the findings from the December staff questionnaire. A higher level of staff morale has, to some degree, helped to alleviate some of the problems with staff absence. However, while rates of absence are reducing, they remain a concern. Leaders are working proactively with staff to address this.

Since taking on the interim headship of the school, you have provided strong and determined leadership. You wasted no time in establishing the school's immediate priorities and commissioned several audits to get a full picture of the school's provision. Early on, you identified a number of significant health and safety issues, mainly concerning fire safety and the fabric of the building. As a result, you took urgent action to address these matters to ensure that the premises were safe for pupils and staff. You introduced 'fix it' – a process for staff to raise health and safety concerns. Staff say this is working well and urgent repairs are usually resolved swiftly. A few problems still exist, such as the poor condition of the ramp leading to one of the mobile classrooms. You are working closely with the local authority to rectify these matters.

You rightly made changes to the post-Ofsted action plan to tighten success criteria,

set expected completion dates, and identify who will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions. Senior leaders and the IEB evaluate this plan monthly to determine progress made towards meeting improvement objectives. The revised plan is appropriate and, if implemented, should help the school to achieve its aims. You have made explicit what are leaders' responsibilities and given them the necessary support and guidance to enable them to carry out their roles more effectively. Members of the senior leadership team, under your effective guidance, are working collaboratively and with a clear sense of purpose. You have empowered them to make strategic decisions and arranged suitable support with experienced leaders from Wilson Stuart School. This has helped the team to grow in confidence and contribute more effectively to making whole-school improvements.

You have worked hard to introduce new systems that have brought greater structure and organisation to the school's plans to improve. You have devised a year planner for staff that makes clear what is expected of everyone. Staff are unanimous in their positive acknowledgement about the changes you have implemented in a short period of time. They say that they welcome the clearer direction and are now much more aware of what is expected of them. While the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have continued, leaders have not yet embarked on whole-school strategies to further enhance the quality of teaching. This is planned for next term, once the new assessment arrangements are secure.

Leaders' work to further develop and support middle leaders was initially slow to take off. This has meant that the implementation of faculty action plans that should have been well underway has been delayed. Wilson Stuart School is currently offering support with English. Mathematics and science faculty support is planned to start later this term. Faculty leaders say that since November there has been 'a lot more momentum' in relation to school improvement. They say that senior leaders listen to their views and involve them well in decision-making about faculty improvement plans. Middle leaders' recognition that, more recently, there is better unity among staff was captured well by the comment, 'everyone is taking responsibility'. Inspection evidence strongly supports this feeling of a close-knit team working towards a common goal.

Leaders' actions to improve assessment systems are behind schedule. In the autumn term, teachers' lack of consistency in the way they arrived at judgements meant that assessments were not always accurate. However, over the last few months, you have invested significant time in developing an effective system for assessment. This will help teachers to establish which pupils are achieving well and which need additional intervention. Staff have been involved in the development of this new system and therefore have a good understanding of how it works. The system is designed so parents will be able to see easily how their children are progressing. Teachers have recently established baseline assessments for all pupils and this information will be used to measure progress. You say that the new assessment system will be fully operational by Easter 2019. Evidence gathered

during the inspection indicates that this is likely to be the case.

Leaders have made limited progress in relation to improving the school's sixth-form provision. However, you have very recently set up a working group to explore the organisation of the sixth form; this includes students' outcomes and the key skills that they need to transfer successfully to the next stage of their education, employment or training. Work has already started on improving students' careers information, advice and guidance. It has begun with an evaluation of the school's careers work against the Gatsby Benchmarks – nationally recognised benchmarks of best practice.

Leaders' actions to ensure that the expenditure of pupil premium funding is properly evaluated are incomplete. A pupil premium review has still not been carried out, although this term you commissioned an external consultant to support with the evaluation of the school's pupil premium strategy. Leaders have not yet systematically identified the barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. Therefore, they cannot say with conviction whether the strategies to support these pupils are the right ones. Pupil premium funding is used for a wide range of purposes including to pay, partially, for the salaries of specific staff. However, leaders' evaluation of impact remains relatively weak. In December, you appointed a new lead for pupil premium. At the start of this term, they began to review the expenditure of pupil premium funding. The leader is already beginning to raise the profile of disadvantaged pupils and gain an understanding of the barriers to learning these pupils may experience.

The IEB demonstrates a strong commitment to assisting the school on its journey of improvement. It works closely with school leaders and plays an effective, central and strategic role in overseeing the leadership of the school. Minutes of meetings reflect the IEB's careful monitoring of the quality of education for pupils and students. A consistent group of IEB members attend monthly meetings to hold leaders rigorously to account for the school's performance. The IEB has a comprehensive oversight of how well the post-Ofsted action plan is being implemented. In addition, IEB members visit the school to gain a first-hand perspective of the school's work. The IEB has clarity about what the school needs to achieve and makes these expectations clear to leaders.

The school benefits well from external support. The school improvement service, commissioned by the local authority, has maintained a good overview of the school's progress. This has included consultants visiting the school to assess leaders' work related to safeguarding, staff well-being and the quality of teaching. Notes of visits indicate that school leaders take heed of recommendations from consultants and put these into practice. Staff have welcomed, and made effective use of, the support and leadership expertise from the Wilson Stuart School.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector