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Gilly Hare
Oak Wood School
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Dear Gilly Hare

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oak Wood School

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and the interim executive board are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all subject leaders and teachers have the knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum more effectively, so that it has greater impact on pupils' learning
- work closely with parents and pupils to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence so that both are at least in line with the national average for secondary schools
- embed the new systems in place to improve pupils' behaviour so that it is equally strong in all subjects and areas of the school.

Evidence

During the inspection I met with most members of your leadership team and three members of the interim executive board. These meetings focused on the actions

taken since the last inspection and plans for future school improvement. I also met with five of your middle leaders and a group of six teachers, representing a range of subjects. I spoke to a group of eight pupils at lunchtime to ascertain their views about improvements made since the previous inspection. I held telephone discussions with the interim executive headteacher and with the head of school improvement at Hillingdon. I visited lessons jointly with your deputy headteacher to look at how teachers are implementing the curriculum. In lessons, I sampled pupils' work to gain a view about the progress they are making through the curriculum. I looked carefully at the school's behaviour and attendance records, and explored with leaders their analysis and interpretation of the information. I also scrutinised the school's checks on the suitability of staff and held a discussion with your designated safeguarding leader.

Context

Since the previous inspection, significant changes in leadership have taken place. The previous headteacher left in January 2019. The deputy headteacher acted as interim headteacher for two months. The deputy headteacher of Swakeleys Girls School, a local outstanding school, was appointed as the interim head of school for Oak Wood in April 2019. At the same time, the headteacher of Swakeleys was appointed as the interim executive headteacher of Oak Wood. The interim executive headteacher typically spends part of a day each week at Oak Wood. The school population has increased significantly since the last inspection. The number of support staff has also increased. Years 7, 8 and 9 are now mixed gender; years 10 and 11 are boys only.

Main findings

Since your arrival at Oak Wood, you have shared a clear and convincing plan for improving the school with staff, parents and pupils. This plan is based on sharp and accurate self-evaluation. It is a deep and honest reflection of the school's current position. The leadership team is competent and fully supportive of you. Leaders are under no illusion about the scale of the work needed to secure a good quality of education for all pupils.

Work done to improve pupils' personal development and welfare has been effective. New systems are in place to improve behaviour, attendance and punctuality. Previously, teachers moved pupils to other classes when their behaviour did not meet the required standard. This did not work well; it did not stop too many instances of low-level disruption in lessons. The new 'relocation' system has been well thought through and organised effectively. Teachers have been trained to use agreed behaviour management strategies before a 'callout' is triggered. Staff and pupils know and understand the Oak Wood behaviour code, which underpins the new behaviour policy. There is more work to do to eradicate low-level disruption, but the early signs of positive impact are evident.

Attendance has been below average and not improving for some time. Persistent absence and punctuality have been key priorities for improvement. The attendance team's capacity has been increased by the recruitment of a support officer who works closely with the existing attendance officer. They have worked in a smarter way by spending more time working with the most vulnerable families. Again, there are early indications of positive impact. Persistent absence has gone down in the past six months and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved. Despite these improvements, overall absence and persistent absence are still above the national average. Due to tighter arrangements in place at the start of the school day, pupils' punctuality in the morning has improved considerably.

Reviewing the curriculum at key stage 3 and improving the quality of education has been another key priority. All subjects have now created clear plans showing what they will teach and when during the course of the academic year. These plans are on the school's website, together with information about how pupils will be assessed. However, some subject leaders and teachers do not have a secure understanding of how to plan the curriculum so that pupils learn the right things in the right order. Many subjects are at the early stages of improving the key stage 3 curriculum based on their analysis of the concepts taught in key stage 4. Middle leaders are given good professional development opportunities to take this crucial aspect of the school's work forward. Leaders' method for checking the quality of teaching and learning is beginning to reflect this new approach.

The interim executive board has been effective in holding leaders to account. The board took decisive action with support from the local authority to establish the right model of leadership for Oak Wood. The package of support brokered from Swakeleys School has been instrumental in implementing and consolidating school improvement.

External support

The ongoing support from Swakeleys School is proving to be particularly effective in improving the practice of middle leaders and teachers. Subject leaders and teachers from Oak Wood, for example, visit their counterparts in Swakeleys to observe, discuss and share ideas. These professional exchanges have had a positive impact on the quality of curriculum planning, assessment and teaching at Oak Wood.

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

Yours sincerely

Nasim Butt
Her Majesty's Inspector