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Miss Samirah Roberts
Acting Headteacher
Rugby Free Secondary School
Anderson Avenue
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Warwickshire
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Dear Miss Roberts

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Rugby Free Secondary School

Following my visit to your school with Gwen Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, on 17 and 18 December 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 May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

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

The school's action 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 Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Yates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2019

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders strengthen the communication and relationships among staff so that all work together to improve the school
 - leaders systematically and realistically evaluate the effectiveness of the school and act swiftly to improve any weaknesses
 - all staff apply consistently the school’s policies, especially those relating to behaviour
 - leaders gain quickly an accurate view of the quality of teaching so that plans can be put in place to improve teaching.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that all groups of pupils, especially the middle-ability and disadvantaged pupils, make the progress they are capable of by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan lessons that match the needs and abilities of pupils, especially middle-ability pupils
 - teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - senior leaders systematically and in sufficient detail evaluate and monitor the quality of teaching so that they can identify any underperformance quickly
 - teachers set tasks that engage and motivate pupils so that they do not become disengaged, display off-task behaviour or take part in low-level disruption.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders formulate and implement a behaviour policy that is consistently applied by all staff and understood by pupils
 - leaders do not accept standards of behaviour from pupils that disrupt learning or waste learning time
 - staff have high expectations of pupils’ behaviour and conduct in lessons.
- Improve outcomes, particularly for middle-ability and disadvantaged pupils, by ensuring that pupils complete their work and that teachers address systematically pupils’ misconceptions.

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 17 December 2019 to 18 December 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, other senior leaders, the chair of the trust, the chief executive officer (CEO), the chair of the sustainable improvement board (SIB), the chair of the parents' and carers' advisory board (PCAB), a representative of the local authority, the special educational needs coordinator, the attendance officer, the business manager, staff and pupils. An inspector spoke to parents on the telephone. An inspector visited an off-site alternative provision.

Inspectors visited lessons accompanied by senior leaders. They evaluated the work in pupils' books. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and observed behaviour in lessons and during social times.

Context

From May 2019, the trust took executive control of the school. The CEO was based full time in the school. An educational adviser was appointed for three days a week to support the CEO in reviewing the role of the senior leadership team and to plan for September 2019. A deputy headteacher was appointed in June 2019 to oversee pupils' behaviour. The headteacher has been absent from school since May 2019. An acting headteacher was appointed in September 2019. Local governance was delegated to the SIB.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. There are pockets of effective practice in, for example, history, design and technology and in some English and mathematics lessons. However, too much weak practice is evident. Where teaching is effective, there are high expectations of attitudes to learning, a high level of challenge and work is matched to meet the needs of all groups. Previous knowledge and prior learning are built on effectively. As a result, pupils make strong progress in these lessons.

Where teaching is less effective, misconceptions are rarely addressed and teachers' feedback does not help to improve pupils' learning. Missing and incomplete work in books is not addressed by pupils or teachers. Pupils' work is poorly presented and of a low standard. In the less effective lessons, work is not matched to pupils' needs and results in a few pupils losing focus and becoming disengaged from their learning. This hinders pupils' progress.

Effective training led by the acting headteacher has resulted in senior leaders having

an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Monitoring by leaders has helped to identify underperformance. Appropriate action is being taken to address this. However, it is too early to see the impact of these actions on improving the overall quality of teaching and learning.

The implementation of a new behaviour policy in September 2019 is having a significant impact on improving standards of behaviour. Involving parents and carers in the writing of the policy means that expectations for behaviour in school are reinforced at home. Pupils told us they like the new policy and understand how it works. They say that it is used effectively, consistently and fairly. They value the rewards available to them because they were asked their opinion about the types of reward available. Consequently, the number of pupils with positive behaviour points this term has significantly increased.

The school is calm and orderly. Effective relationships support good behaviour. Pupils, staff and parents say that behaviour has significantly improved. The high level of staff supervision at social times maintains good order. Pupils say they feel safe at all times. The use of restorative conversations between staff and pupils following an incident is helping pupils to begin to self-regulate their behaviour. However, this new process is still in its early stages and needs further refinement.

Staff told us that they feel well supported by leaders in the management of behaviour. Strategies such as the use of call-out gives teachers the support they need. Staff value the additional training on offer and they have confidence in leaders to follow actions through effectively. As a result, staff morale is high.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Since taking up her post in September 2019, the acting headteacher has quickly established herself within the school and has developed positive working relationships with members of the trust, the CEO, senior leaders and staff of the school. She has galvanised the staff and provided a strong role model for senior and middle leaders. Together with experienced trustees, the CEO, and members of the SIB and PCAB, she has made some significant changes in order to instigate the necessary improvements across the school. These have been achieved in a short period. However, while there are clear improvements in some aspects of the school's performance, notably in the standard of behaviour and staff morale, some key weaknesses remain.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are using this to inform effective action towards the removal of serious weaknesses. The school's action plan details a range of strategies that are addressing the areas for improvement. It is clear who will do what and when. Measurable success criteria enable leaders to evaluate the impact of their actions effectively.

Trustees' effective and timely actions have contributed to the improvements that

have been secured in some aspects of the school's performance. For example, the external reviews they recommended for attendance and the subsequent actions taken by leaders have resulted in a 2% improvement in attendance this term and a significant reduction in the number of pupils late for school. However, leaders acknowledge further improvement is still needed in these areas.

The SIB closely monitors the progress of the post-inspection action plan. The SIB holds the acting headteacher to account effectively. Consequently, good progress is being made towards some of the school's priorities for improvement.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding is planned for March 2020.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The trustees, CEO and acting headteacher share a clear and ambitious vision for the school and for what the pupils can achieve. They work together to get things done. They continue to review and evaluate their actions. This ensures continual improvement.

External support

The local authority provides effective provision for a small number of pupils who find mainstream education difficult to access. This is provided by the local authority's flexible learning team.