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Mr Peter Gillett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gillett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hertswood Academy

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 2020, 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 received an overall effectiveness judgement of requires improvement at its last inspection.

Senior leaders and governors 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:

- accelerate the implementation of plans to improve further so that the school is fully prepared for its next inspection
- review how effectively pupils' behaviour is managed so that learning in lessons is not disrupted and pupils say with confidence that they feel free from all forms of bullying.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your team of senior leaders, a group of pupils, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You shared a range of documents with me to show recent developments and the impact of leaders' actions to improve the school. I visited a range of lessons with senior leaders to observe pupils at work.

Context

Since the last inspection, pupils and staff have settled quickly into the school's new, purpose-built accommodation and are becoming familiar with the new learning environment. Until the outdoor environment is fully completed, the space available for pupils at breaks and lunchtimes is limited. There have been significant changes in staffing; several staff are new to the school.

Main findings

At the time of the previous inspection, staff and pupils had just moved into the new buildings. This was all very new to them. They have quickly adjusted and are making the most of the school's excellent facilities. They talked positively about the social areas and spaces for learning, such as the atrium and study zones. They appreciate the work you and your staff have done to help them settle in to their new surroundings.

You have put in place suitable plans for improvement. Plans include actions to tackle all of the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. You and your team of leaders can show that these actions are leading to improvement. However, you acknowledge that, now the school has stabilised, the rate of improvement needs to accelerate to make sure it is ready for its next inspection.

My visits to lessons with senior leaders confirmed your views that learning is still not planned well enough, and that developing the curriculum further remains one of the school's top priorities. Staff know they need to develop their planning of learning so that it is progressive and enables pupils to build on what they already know. They are currently reviewing their curriculum plans to achieve this and to make full use of the school's new facilities and resources. This review includes a decision to implement a new, three-year programme of learning in all subjects in key stage 3 from September 2020.

In lessons, teachers encourage pupils to remember more by testing their understanding and asking them to recall key facts they have learned previously. Short activities at the start of lessons are used effectively to jog pupils' memories and consolidate their learning. However, pupils' books show that learning is not

always planned well enough. Pupils cover a lot of topics in a short space of time that are not linked together. They do not spend enough time learning in depth. Pupils told me that they feel most staff know what they want to teach but do not always make it interesting and fun to do.

There are inconsistencies in teaching that need ironing out to ensure that the revised curriculum is implemented effectively. You and your governors are committed to maximising the use of the impressive new study areas by combining some classes together for lessons. This innovative approach has huge potential, but is at an early stage of development. Currently, pupils feel that they do not always learn well enough in these lessons.

Assessment remains underdeveloped. Pupils' GCSE target grades are recorded but information about their current achievement does not relate to these targets in a meaningful way. This information does not inform teachers about how well pupils are doing or enable them to identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers do not use the information they currently have about pupils to adapt learning to match their needs. Not all teachers make regular checks of pupils' work to make sure they understand, or to correct basic errors in their spelling and grammar.

Effective action has been taken to improve provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A recent review of the SEND register has identified those pupils who have the greatest need of additional help. Teachers and support staff have met to identify how they can support the needs of pupils. Procedures to teach these pupils in key stage 3 are enabling them to learn effectively in a nurturing, caring environment. 'Pupil passports' are being used to inform teachers of the specific needs of pupils and how they can be met. In other classes, extra help is limited. Alternative provision in place at the time of the previous inspection has been maintained and developed further, as you feel this is working well.

More needs to be done to maintain the good behaviour and attitudes noted at the time of the last inspection. Your own monitoring shows a trend of improvement. For example, fewer fixed-term exclusions have been necessary this year. You feel that your system of 'on-call', sanctions and rewards are all working. This view is not fully shared by the small group of pupils I met with during the inspection. They feel that there is disruption in some lessons that is not dealt with effectively. Most pupils say they feel safe but also said that there is too much bullying in school, particularly racist bullying. When asked, not all of them were clear about what they should do if this happened to them.

Governors remain determined to help the school to improve. They rightly feel that it is further along on its journey to becoming a good school. They also recognise that, now new buildings are in place, the next stage is to develop a broad curriculum and consistent teaching that provides all pupils with a good education. They

demonstrate an improved awareness of the curriculum and the actions being taken to improve it. Meetings with the coordinator of pupils with SEND have enabled them to hold you and other leaders more accountable for improving provision for these pupils.

External support

You are engaging well with the local authority. The local authority has brokered an improvement partner to support you in your work. You have asked local authority staff to visit the school later this year to carry out reviews of the quality of education and governance.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector