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Nigel Sellars
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sellars

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gosford Hill School

Following my visit to your school on 15 July 2021, 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(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- embed the improvements to the quality of education so that it is consistently strong across the school for all pupils.

Context

There have been changes to leadership and governance since the inspection in February 2018. The school joined the River Learning Trust (RLT) multi-academy trust in December 2020. Currently, there is no deputy headteacher so other staff are temporarily seconded to the leadership team. A new deputy headteacher is due to join the school in September.

Main findings

Your ambitions for all at the school are clear to see in your well-considered plans and the steps you have taken so far. You are understandably frustrated at the added difficulties the pandemic has created for Gosford Hill, especially the way it has hampered improvements to the quality of education. You launched the new approach to the curriculum just before the first partial closure of schools. Repeated periods of staff and pupils having to self-isolate and work from home have hindered intended improvements. These improvements are not yet securely embedded throughout the school for all pupils.

Senior leaders and improvement officers from the trust have supported subject leaders well to redesign their curriculum plans. While some plans are still in development, in others there is a clear focus on making sure that what pupils need to learn is organised logically and in a way that is intended to build their knowledge.

Most teachers have routinely adopted the activities that you and your team have introduced, such as the 'DNA' or 'do now activity'. They use this to find out what pupils can remember about a topic. Some are skilled at then using this information to adapt their lesson or subsequent lessons to help pupils to know more and remember more. Pupils I spoke to really like these activities and told me that they help them to recall and remember their learning.

You have raised teachers' expectations of what all pupils can achieve. Teachers understand that they all have responsibility for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders in your inclusion team have recognised that the information that staff are provided with about these pupils is not as clear or useful as it needs to be. The inclusion team is planning to produce a 'snapshot' to help teachers understand how to adapt lessons to meet pupils' specific needs. However, there is a lack of urgency around this important work.

The work of your leaders responsible for reading has had varied results. Their work to help the weakest readers is going well. You have made sure that the commercial reading programme is used to supplement the actions of the skilled teachers leading this work. However, your team has evaluated the actions taken to create a culture of reading in the school and found that they have not had the desired impact. They have planned a new approach to this for September.

Year 11 and Year 13 pupils have left school, all with plans and staff to support them as they start their new destinations in September.

Local governors have been focused and have held you to account for your work. They have a good understanding of the current priorities of the school and what still needs to be done.

Additional support

You have benefited from the support and challenge provided by RLT. For example, school improvement partners have worked closely with you to help ensure that improvement plans are focused on the right aspects and that actions have the desired impact. They have helped to develop subject leaders and created valuable connections with other schools in the trust.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, some subject leaders, teachers, pupils, trust representatives including the chief executive officer (CEO) and representatives of those responsible for local governance to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited some lessons, looked at pupils' work and scrutinised curriculum plans. I considered school improvement plans, minutes from the meetings of governors and checked the single central record. I considered the views of parents through the 130 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 37 written comments. I also took account of the views of staff through conversations and the 76 responses to the online staff survey.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the RLT multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector