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14 September 2021

Mr Peter Gillett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gillett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hertswood Academy

Following my visit with Marc White, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 13 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 was judged to be requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection, and safeguarding was judged to be ineffective at its section 8 monitoring inspection in February 2021.

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 not taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that leaders and governors are working collectively and collaboratively with one another to share accurate, detailed, and timely information, so that they can identify issues and increase the rigour and pace of improvements in the school
- improve the accuracy, detail and quality of communication between governors, parents, and staff to ensure that stakeholders have confidence in the actions being taken by leaders to improve the school.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there have been changes in staff and governors as detailed in the section 8 monitoring inspection report in February 2021. Following completion of the new school building, all pupils now attend the same school site.

Main findings

Inspectors identified significant weaknesses in safeguarding in February 2021. A safeguarding team has been put in place to address the day-to-day running of this work. This team has acted rapidly, with the support of the local authority, to address the urgent issues. Training has ensured that staff have a better understanding of their statutory responsibilities, in line with the most up-to-date guidance. Leaders have established systems that allow them to be more vigilant to individual concerns as they arise, and to make timely and appropriate referrals to external agencies when needed. As a result of this work, safeguarding is now effective.

Governance has improved in recent months. Following the concerns raised by inspectors, there has been intensive training and the appointment of new governors to add capacity to the governing body. Governors are now carrying out purposeful on-site visits to check the accuracy of the information they receive from leaders. Governors use this information to challenge leaders about the quality of education, behaviour and safeguarding in the school. Much of this work has been closely supported by the local authority.

Although safeguarding is now effective, leaders and governors are not collectively taking effective action to address the other areas that require improvement in the school, so it may become good. Governors are now raising increasingly complex questions based upon the evidence they gather and have access to. However, the most senior leaders are not consistently responding to these questions in a timely, clear, or detailed way. As a result, leaders and governors have differing and sometimes contradictory views about the effectiveness of the school provision. For instance, leaders have an overly generous view about the effectiveness of the school, but governors are not always confident in the evidence that they have to

agree with what leaders' report. Leaders and governors are not communicating as effectively and clearly with each other and with other stakeholders. As a result, some staff, parents, and governors do not have confidence in the actions being taken by leaders to address the weaknesses in the school.

Some leaders are new to their roles and are still implementing systems and processes to oversee and review the impact of their work; including across behaviour, bullying, curriculum and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These systems are helping to improve the day-to-day running at the school. However, the most senior leaders are not reviewing and evaluating information sufficiently well to identify where the school needs a greater pace for improvement. These weaknesses in leaders' evaluation, coupled with the challenges of the pandemic, means that too often it is local authority representatives who are identifying the issues for school leaders to address, as opposed to the leaders themselves.

The behaviour leader is raising expectations about how pupils should behave. Leaders are now recording incidents of pupils' behaviour and acting to address issues quickly. For those pupils who struggle to regulate their behaviour, staff are using a range of strategies to support the pupils, including effective use of short-term intervention through the school's learning support unit. Consequently, behaviour is starting to improve, and bullying incidents are beginning to reduce. The majority of pupils and staff agree. Pupils say that if there are any incidents, they are being quickly dealt with. However, there remains a small but significant number of pupils who feel that low-level disruption and name calling remain issues to be dealt with at the school.

Curriculum plans have been developed in all subjects and are now in the process of being put in place. Subject leaders have considered the content of the curriculum and the knowledge pupils need to learn. Teachers are now using these plans to ensure that they build upon pupils' prior learning and check that pupils have remembered what they have learned over time. However, the implementation of the curriculum is still in its early stages.

Leaders have identified pupils who require additional support with reading. Leaders understand that reading is crucial for pupils to access their learning across all subjects. Teachers use a range of methods to check pupils' reading fluency and understanding. Teachers are considering this information to inform their planning and provide a range of targeted support to help weaker readers catch up.

Pupils' specific needs are more accurately identified. Leaders are beginning to support teachers to adapt their planning so pupils with SEND are able to access all areas of the curriculum successfully, while also being supported in their individual areas of need. While the processes and systems to identify and support pupils with SEND have been reviewed and are now more securely in place. This work is in its

early stages of development and more time is required to know what difference this work is making.

Additional support

Leaders have paid to receive support from Herts for Learning (HfL), who are Hertfordshire County Council's commissioned school improvement service. HfL have carried out reviews of the areas for improvement from the previous inspections. Leaders routinely act upon recommendations made by HfL. This has contributed towards ensuring safeguarding processes and systems to make sure pupils are safe are in place.

The governing body have undertaken appropriate training since the previous monitoring inspection. With external support from HfL, governors, some of whom are new, have taken on board what they have learned and are applying this to their work in holding leaders to account.

Evidence

During the inspection, we held meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance to discuss the actions taken since the previous section 5 inspection.

The inspection took place during a whole school sports day event. Inspectors observed behaviour and spoke to pupils and adults during this time. We also met with groups of teaching staff, non-teaching staff, pupils and members of the safeguarding team.

A wide range of documents were scrutinised including safeguarding records, behaviour logs and incidents, governing body minutes and on-site visit reports, the accelerated improvement plan, reports from HfL, curriculum planning, pupils' work and EHC plans.

Inspectors also took account of leaders' own pupil surveys, the 170 responses made by parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, the 56 responses to Ofsted's free-text system and 20 emails from parents. Additionally, as well as looking at leaders' own staff survey, we took into account the 80 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.

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 reports website.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector