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6 November 2023

Andy Abel
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Dear Mr Abel

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Heycroft Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 3 October 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 2023.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, the executive headteacher and the chair of the interim executive board the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also held meetings with other leaders, conducted joint lesson visits, held separate discussions with pupils and staff, and reviewed documentation, such as the school development plan. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the last inspection, there have been minimal changes to leadership and staffing. This is testament to the faith colleagues have in you and other leaders to effect the change required. As part of this monitoring inspection, I considered four key aspects: pupils' behaviour, curriculum development, the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and the safeguarding processes and procedures.

You worked on improving pupils' behaviour first, recognising that pupils need to behave to be ready to learn. You introduced a clear policy, using assemblies for pupils and training for staff to quickly bed in the new changes to expectations and procedures. For example, staff now structure their praise around how a pupil showed one of the four 'R' values to help embed these behaviours into pupils' typical conduct. However, these improvements in behaviour are not reflected at break and lunchtimes. During these times, incidents of poor behaviour are too frequent. You and other leaders are aware this needs to improve. There are sensible plans to address this, such as revitalising the outdoor spaces to facilitate more purposeful play.

Your cross-school working has supported rapid improvements to the curriculum. You were discerning in your selection of schemes of work. These provide staff with a clear steer regarding what should be taught and when. Most of these programmes begin in Year 1. You are aware of the need for ongoing work to determine what words, ideas and skills will be best for children in the early years to learn, so they are well prepared for key stage 1.

However, the content in these newly introduced curriculums is not being realised well in lessons. Too often, explanations are lengthy or confusing. Pupils' attention wanes and they then struggle to complete the activities well. Sometimes, pupils are congratulated for verbal responses or work that is either of a poor quality or does not meet the objective of the question or task set. Staff do not always notice or put right these issues. Consequently, pupils are still not learning as well as they should.

In an effort not to overwhelm staff, your rigorous programme of monitoring is not yet fully underway. Curriculum leaders are eagerly waiting in the wings, keen to apply this training through the subject leader network meetings they attend. You have astutely arranged it, so that external experts support curriculum leaders with their monitoring. You aim for this to upskill curriculum leaders in how to evaluate accurately and how to use this evaluation to determine suitable staff support that remedies any weaknesses.

Expertise exists in the school to ensure accurate identification of pupils with SEND. Though the specified support as it exists on documentation is precise, measurable and time-limited, it is not being realised as well as it should during lessons. This is because the support pupils receive in class does not always reflect what is on the plans. Leaders' checks of what occurs in the classroom for pupils with SEND are infrequent. Staff require greater guidance to help them consistently put in place the support that is on pupils'

plans. They also need help to ensure they understand and apply important takeaway points from the training they receive about how best to support pupils with SEND.

Though they recognise the need for it, some staff are finding the pace of change difficult to manage. You have raised staff expectations. While they adjust, staff need much in the way of support to understand why change is necessary and how best to embed these changes into their everyday practice.

Acting on external evaluation, and the rigorous challenge from the interim executive board, you have formulated clear systems for managing safeguarding. These revised systems acted as the catalyst to produce a palpable, positive culture of safeguarding in the school. You, other leaders and staff pull together to protect pupils from harm, following up concerns determinedly to ensure vulnerable pupils get the help they need.

The local authority formed the interim executive board carefully, recruiting members with the necessary knowledge and skills. You benefit from their expertise and ability to carefully consider the information they receive. It means they point out potential pitfalls and provide pertinent counsel that aids your school improvement work. It is notable that the issues identified in this report are ones that you and the interim executive board are aware of and are working to address.

You, and others working in the school, refer favourably to the external support the local authority commissioned. Those providing support mostly hail from the South East Essex Academy Trust – a multi-academy trust the school is due to join in January 2024. Support has included focused reviews. These involve auditing an aspect of the school to identify issues and set out the best course of action to resolve them. You have appreciated the timely follow-up visits to check progress against actions, highlighting how this ensures sustained improvement in the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Short
His Majesty's Inspector