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Craig Neal
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Dear Dr Neal

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Bexhill High Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 7 February 2024, 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 took place because the school has received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspection.

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, other senior leaders, staff and trustees the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, spoke to a wide range of pupils and observed pupils' behaviour. I scrutinised school documents, talked to many staff and met with trustees. 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 become good.

Main findings

In January 2024, you were appointed as the substantive headteacher and have appointed other leaders to pivotal positions within the school. Together with leaders and trustees, you recognise the areas that need to improve in this school and have not shied away from the challenges highlighted in the last inspection. You have been working closely with leaders from the Mulberry Schools Trust and are forming positive working relationships with their leaders. This has brought benefits such as leadership experience, shared training events and cooperation between trustees. Staff that I spoke to during the inspection were eager to put in place your well-considered plans for improvement.

Along with senior leaders, the teaching and learning staff group is driving improvements in the quality of education. There is a new teaching framework in place and early signs show that teachers are supportive of the new routines and expectations that have been introduced. For example, teachers meet and greet pupils at the beginning of lessons and focus on providing clear explanations and precise modelling of skills when needed. Teachers are also embedding a new assessment policy that has been implemented with a view to reducing teacher workload. You have refined school policies so that effective action is taken when standards in the classroom are not high enough.

Staff increasingly understand the link between identifying the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), reading and access to the curriculum. Leaders are currently embedding new approaches to teaching pupils with lower reading ages to improve their fluency and comprehension. Staff have been trained in the teaching of phonics and a programme of extra support has been put in place for the weakest readers. Leaders understand that the next stage will involve ensuring that reading support brings weaker readers up to a level where they can access the curriculum fully, while ensuring that teachers use their phonics understanding to provide effective support.

You prioritised improving the school's approach to managing the needs of pupils. There is now a more careful identification of pupils with SEND. Staff are developing a more expert understanding of how to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are communicated to staff, along with the strategies that help them the most. Trustees have been involved in overseeing the implementation of this new approach and early signs are promising. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of these new strategies fully.

You have introduced a new behaviour policy, and this is leading to improved behaviour. Pupils and staff recognise that classrooms and social areas are calmer and more orderly. Pupils believe that there is still low-level disruption in some lessons and particularly in lessons where temporary staff are used. However, overall, pupils feel that behaviour has improved. Central to the improvements in behaviour have been the revamped rewards policy. This is gaining momentum. The reward assemblies and rewards points system are inspiring pupils to do their best, behave well and work harder. The changes to the main social area in the school, the newly named 'atrium', have been warmly received by pupils, who report that the school is a 'nicer place to be' compared with at the time of the last inspection.

Over the past two years, your work to embed higher standards has resulted in an increase in the number of pupils permanently excluded and suspended. Recent changes to the provision for those pupils at risk of suspension is helping to reduce these rates. The Academic Centre of Excellence is providing a calm and focused alternative for pupils who need extra help getting back on track. Although there have been palpable improvements in behaviour, some pupils perceive staff actions around bullying to be ineffective. You and your team are working hard on this and recognise that there is still more work to do. Your approach to improving pupils' attendance is working. The school supports families and pupils effectively, working closely with the families of pupils with low attendance to ensure that any barriers to attending school are recognised and diminished.

Trustees are committed to ensuring that the school provides pupils with a good education. Trustees are aware of their own skills and training needs, and how to ensure that they provide secure oversight of the school's statutory responsibilities. Trustees work with external consultants to gauge an accurate view of the school and to understand how well leaders' actions are driving forward the improvements that are needed. This work, together with the ongoing partnership with the Mulberry Schools Trust, is viewed positively by leaders and seen as an important step towards further improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Harry Ingham
His Majesty's Inspector