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Nikki Mason
Headteacher
The Orchard School
Cambridge Road
Canterbury
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Dear Ms Mason

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Orchard School

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are beginning to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen leadership and governance by:
 - reviewing the school improvement plan to include milestones that clearly identify what is to be achieved by when, to make clear who is responsible for monitoring and evaluation, when and how and to ensure that the role of the governing body is identified
 - developing a governing body action plan to address the priorities identified within the recent review
 - strengthen the headteacher's report to the governing body so that sufficient priority is afforded to the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

- ensure targets for students' progress are adequately challenging and that systems for target setting and tracking progress are understood by staff and governors
 - devise, communicate and implement more robust systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school and use information on students' progress to monitor the effectiveness of the school's actions.
- Raise achievement by:
- using the information gained from data analysis and pupil progress meetings to intervene more swiftly.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher as well as with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and a range of other documentary evidence, including examples of the headteacher's monitoring records and tracking data relating to students' progress was scrutinised. You took me on a tour of the school and we made brief visits to all classes to look at the impact of actions taken since the inspection in October 2013.

Context

Since the previous inspection the deputy headteacher has left the school and a new, highly experienced, deputy headteacher took up post in January 2014.

Main findings

Whilst this visit acknowledged that some significant actions have been taken since the previous inspection, there are aspects of improvement that now require immediate attention. As discussed during the visit, these relate particularly to the strength of most senior leadership and governance and are listed above.

Steps have been taken to address concerns relating to the management of students' behaviour. An external audit was commissioned and the findings shared with all staff. Following staff training, improvements to students' behaviour are now being realised through the consistent application of systems and practices. All students have individual behaviour targets and these are highly visible in classrooms and were regularly referred to by teachers and support staff during the tour of the school. Moreover, students' success with managing their own behaviour is linked to the over-arching rewards system that motivates them to gather 'credits' for a range of rewards. These rewards also play a part in encouraging good attendance. Since the previous inspection a more rigorous approach has been taken to raising attendance, particularly for specifically identified students. The school is taking a

range of appropriate measures to support and challenge parents and carers to ensure their children attend school well. Measures include regular telephone calls home, liaison with the educational welfare officer and the issuing of penalty notices. The tour of the school revealed that not all staff manage challenging behaviour well enough.

All teachers have undergone a professional development programme to raise the quality of teaching. As a result there is a more consistent understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning. The tour of the school demonstrated that learning intentions are routinely being shared with students and that teachers are adapting learning tasks to better meet the needs of each individual. The success with which this is being achieved varies. Students of all ages are now involved in assessing their own and each other's learning more frequently.

An external review of governance has been completed. The review highlights serious deficiencies which urgently require addressing to raise the quality of governance. These matters were discussed with the Chair of the Governing Body during this visit. A governors 'data group' has been established to ensure that identified governors are able to interpret and robustly challenge the range of school performance data, particularly relating to students' progress. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for tracking students' progress has worked with another special school to improve systems for target setting, tracking students' progress and conducting 'pupil progress review meetings'. Changes are too recent to have impacted on students' achievements.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. HMI expressed her intention to visit the school again this academic year.

External support

Shortly prior to the previous inspection in October 2013 the local authority had brokered the support of a National Leader of Education. This support has got off to a slow start. At the time of the HMI visit in January 2014, the Memorandum of Agreement, although drafted, was not formally agreed. Minutes of The Orchard School/Ifield School Accountability Review Meeting as well as discussion with the school improvement adviser signal concern on the part of the local authority. The document gives clear guidance about certain actions to be taken. The comprehensive review of governance conducted by the local authority provides absolute clarity about what must be done. HMI has requested that the local authority scope the possibility of providing more support to the governing body through identifying a mentor for the Chair of the Governing Body. Additionally HMI has requested that the school improvement adviser or a representative from the local authority attend any governing body meetings that take place between now and HMI's next visit in order to model effective governance. HMI has also asked that

the school improvement adviser attend some, or all, of the next round of pupil progress meetings as there is some continuing uncertainty around how best to set students' targets, including the appropriate level of challenge and how to respond to information arising from tracking and discussion with teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector