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Mr Vincent Murray
Headteacher
The Grange School
Wendover Way
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Dear Mr Murray

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Grange School

Following my visit to your school on 29 March 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help that you gave me and for the time that you made available to discuss the actions that you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 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.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the provision for disadvantaged pupils so that they make at least good progress
- set challenging tasks, particularly for the most able pupils, so that they make better overall progress from their starting points.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, members of your senior leadership team, two governors, three middle leaders and the local authority adviser to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation document were considered. I scrutinised a range of other documents including minutes of meetings with the governing body. I read the two external review reports about the school's use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and the effectiveness of governance. I examined documents and information relating to attendance and behaviour. Records and information relating to the school's work to assess and improve the quality of teaching were examined.

Evidence of the quality of teaching and learning was gathered through observation of lessons and through scrutinising pupils' work. I met with pupils formally and informally in lessons.

Context

Since the previous inspection in January 2018, you have appointed a new deputy headteacher and a new head of the English department. The governing body has several new members.

Main findings

You have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You are informed, for example, by the learning walks, lesson observations and work scrutinies that you and other leaders carry out. Your improvement plans focus on achieving the improvements which will make the biggest difference to pupils and their preparation for future life. Leaders review progress against the action plans frequently, moving on quickly from actions which are not leading to improved pupil outcomes. Following a review of the effectiveness of governance, governors are now monitoring pupils' progress more effectively, using increasingly accurate information that leaders share with them. Governors have received training in the use of assessment information and this has helped them to both understand and challenge the reports that they receive. The chair of governors has restructured the meetings cycle and adapted the agenda to ensure that there is more time in the meetings to discuss pupils' achievement.

Outcomes for pupils in 2018 were not as strong as you had hoped, in part because of the inaccuracy of some teachers' predictions. Mathematics was the only subject in which pupils' rates of progress improved significantly. Disadvantaged pupils continued to fall behind their peers in English and science. There is more to do to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good throughout key stages 3 and 4 across all subjects. You are working in partnership with other local schools to support improvement and this is beginning to impact positively on the quality and

accuracy of assessment across the school. There are some encouraging signs in pupils' work that indicate a higher proportion of pupils than previously are making reasonable progress in English and mathematics.

The actions that you have taken to improve teaching are making a difference. Teachers are becoming more adept at focusing on the achievement of different groups of pupils because they are being held to account more rigorously. They have a better understanding of how to use prior attainment to ensure that work is set at the right level. You have focused training for teachers on the use of questioning to challenge pupils in their learning. This strategy was evident during the lessons that I observed, although in some lessons the most able could still do more. You identified that teachers' predictions for pupils' achievement were not always accurate and you have, therefore, put in place mechanisms for both external and internal moderation of work to improve the accuracy of assessment.

Middle leaders are becoming more effective in their roles. They are more skilled at holding teachers to account for the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. They have a clear understanding that standards will not rise until teaching is consistently good, in every lesson, for every pupil. They are ensuring that teachers in their departments keep a close scrutiny on the achievement of groups, including those supported by the pupil premium and the most able. However, these developments are yet to fully impact on the progress of those groups of pupils.

School leaders have done much to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. The introduction of a revised behaviour policy has led to a decrease in the number of incidents reported. The proportion of pupils who are excluded from the school on a fixed-term basis has significantly reduced. Leaders have taken robust action, including improving provision for internal isolation and reducing the length of external exclusions. In the lessons that we visited, most pupils displayed positive attitudes to learning and relationships with teachers were good. Pupils that I spoke with said that a minority of lessons continue to be interrupted by low-level disruption but that teachers have improved how they manage this small number of pupils and that the quality of behaviour has improved overall.

Leaders have taken swift and effective action to improve the level of attendance. At the end of the 2017/18 academic year, attendance was below average. By the end of the Autumn term 2018 it had improved and at the time of the inspection it was close to the national average for secondary schools. The attendance rate for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities has also improved. Action has included training team leaders to prioritise the monitoring of attendance levels and improvements to the quality of communication with parents about punctuality and attendance.

Leaders and governors are showing a determination to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. An external review of the use of pupil premium funding led to an overhaul of approaches and changes to the monitoring and evaluation processes.

The school's performance information for disadvantaged pupils is analysed to identify underperformance. Subsequently, you have ensured bespoke support for pupils who are falling behind. You have also improved systems for measuring the impact of the interventions. You are making every effort to engage parents and carers as active partners in the education of their children. These changes are still to impact significantly on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and it will be important to continue to monitor, evaluate and review the outcomes from actions taken so that no time is lost to improve the current position.

External support

School leaders engage well with the local authority. Many beneficial links have been established with other schools. These include a peer-mentoring project with the leadership teams at Cressex and Cottesloe schools, and a focus on the most able pupils with Beaconsfield School. The local authority is prioritising the school for support.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robin Boshier
Ofsted Inspector