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Mr Barney Geen
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Geen

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grange Academy

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the section 5 inspection.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that more is consistently good or better
- work with some families to improve attendance
- ensure that the school's website meets requirements.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. I spoke to the chair of the governing body and met five governors. I met a local authority representative and the executive headteacher of Greys Education Centre. I reviewed the school's website, read a range of documentation, including the school's improvement plans, and checked arrangements to safeguard pupils and

staff. You and I carried out brief visits to classes. I spoke to pupils and staff about their work.

Context

The previous headteacher left soon after my second monitoring visit in June 2015. The deputy headteacher, who joined the school in September 2015, was acting headteacher for the Autumn term. A new head of the primary department also joined the school in September 2015. You became the school's interim headteacher in January 2016 and substantive headteacher on 1 June 2016. Responsibility for the leadership of some subjects, including the leadership of mathematics, will change in September 2016. The school is making plans to join a multi-academy trust.

Main findings

Very soon after your appointment, you took immediate action to address weaknesses. Over the past few months, your high level of expertise, your calm determination and your forensic analysis of the quality of teaching and learning have been key factors to the school's rapid improvement.

In contrast to my previous two monitoring visits, in March and June 2015, the right pace of change and the lift in staff's morale are marking the beginning of a remarkable recovery. Your recent appointment as substantive headteacher is consolidating the school's capacity to becoming a good or better school.

You are leading the senior leadership team effectively and are clearly articulating what needs to be done. Your strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning are increasingly effective although you acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils' progress is accelerated in some classes.

With the support of staff, you have achieved a lot in a short space of time. Some of your early successes include:

- the review of teachers' performance with clear targets set to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- the coaching and training of senior leaders leading to a more accurate evaluation of teaching
- your relentless checks to ascertain whether actions are making a difference to pupils' learning and well being
- the better provision for most-able pupils
- the variety of strategies used to listen to pupils and give them more opportunities to have a say about provision at their school
- the reshaping of the timetable to provide more time for tutors to start and finish the day on a positive note
- the closer teamwork between teachers and learning support assistants
- the improved communication with parents through, for example, frequent 'good news' telephone contacts and better reporting of their children's achievements

- the improved learning environment, including more evidence of pupils' successes on the WOW boards.

The daily reading sessions are making a difference to standards. Progress against the school's targets in reading and writing is significant. The leadership of English continues to be a strength of the school. Actions taken to raise achievement in mathematics are taking longer to embed due to the absence of the subject leader. More work is required to meet the school's targets in this subject. You have, however, restructured the teaching team to ensure that current standards are being maintained.

Staff check carefully that pupils understand what they have to do. The larger groupings are leading to better dynamics and interactions between pupils and staff. The homework learning logs show examples of productive engagement with pupils and parents. Your work on British values and the new life skills sessions contribute to developing pupils' confidence. The Year 11 pupils said that they were very excited about going to Bedford College. They also said that 'they are happy at The Grange because teachers are kind' and that 'they are now learning much more'. Further work is required to improve attendance as it is too low, particularly for older pupils.

In lessons and during lunchtime I noted that behaviour is managed in a positive way. The revised behaviour management policy is applied well by staff. As a result, the use of the 'calming room' has reduced significantly from, on average, 15 times per month to only three times in June. From a recent survey, the very large majority of pupils said that they feel safe at the school. You are frequently reviewing procedures and arrangements to safeguard pupils and staff.

Governors are developing clear processes, under your guidance, to check progress against the key issues identified at the inspection and against the weaker aspects of performance following your own robust evaluation of the school's provision. They continue to bring their professional experience and expertise to the work of the school. They said that your leadership is like 'a breath of fresh air'. They support the many changes you are making because you manage these sensitively. They are fully aware of their statutory duties and responsibilities. The school's website, however, does not currently contain all essential information for parents and carers.

External support

The support of the executive headteacher and senior staff from Greys Education Centre is highly valuable to the school. The phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) training, led by the school improvement adviser, contributes to improved practice. You are rightly ensuring that there is coherence across interventions and training so that staff receive consistent messages. You welcome the closer partnership with the local authority and, as a headteacher new to the area, you appreciate the support and advice of the director of children's services.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector