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Kate Williams
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Dear Ms Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Longhill High School

Following my visit to your school on 22 February 2018, 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 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 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:

- increase most-able pupils' progress, so they can attain the highest standards
- ensure that all staff strictly implement the school's approaches to teaching, learning and managing pupils' behaviour
- develop pupils' self-confidence and understanding of what it means to be a good learner.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, members of the governing body and the school improvement partner. I also met with middle leaders, a group of staff and a representative group of pupils. Plans to improve the school and their impact on behaviour and achievement were reviewed. I visited a number of lessons

in different subjects and year groups, accompanied by members of the senior team, where I looked at pupils' work, behaviour and attitudes to learning.

Context

There have been a number of changes to staff since the last inspection. You took up your post in June 2016. Upon being appointed, you reviewed the leadership and staffing structure and reorganised roles and responsibilities. Since the last inspection, 18 teachers have left the school and 10 have been appointed, including several senior and middle leaders. A new chair of governors has been elected and some new members have also joined the governing body.

Main findings

You and your leadership team responded promptly to the findings from the last inspection and set about making the necessary improvements to pupils' behaviour. You rightly focused on reducing low-level interruptions and disruption to lessons. A group of staff worked together with pupils to review the behaviour policy and establish better procedures for managing pupils' behaviour. The new policy has streamlined the system and made it much easier for pupils to understand and for staff to implement. The 'warn, move, remove' system has considerably reduced the number of disruptions to lessons. Incidents are followed up consistently and you and your team ensure that pupils make amends for any misdemeanours.

Teachers feel more confident about asserting themselves and insisting upon high standards. During the inspection, I saw motivated pupils who want to learn and who value the positive relationships they have with staff. Pupils clearly appreciate being able to get on with their work with fewer interruptions.

Nevertheless, pupils told me that although behaviour had improved, pupils' conduct in lessons still 'depended on the teacher'. There are some staff who do not insist upon pupils' full concentration and attention. In these cases, high standards slip and pupils lose their sense of purpose. Some pupils are not confident when answering and asking questions because they have not been guided sufficiently about what it means to be diligent and articulate. A few pupils do not know how to use their time wisely without prompting from staff.

Leadership has been strengthened throughout the school. Senior and middle leaders are eager to work together productively and take responsibility for making improvements. You and your team have successfully brought about a change in staff's attitude to pupils' achievement. Through better-quality day-to-day teaching and learning, you are raising standards, without losing any of the school's welcoming atmosphere.

You were understandably disappointed with, but not surprised by, the 2017 examination results. These results reflect a period of turbulence in the school, a history of weaker teaching and older pupils' difficulty in meeting higher expectations. Your predictions for examination results are accurate and tested over time. You are

confident that the progress of pupils currently in the school is faster, and their consequent attainment at the end of key stage 4 will be more promising. For example, disadvantaged pupils are keeping up, and in many cases overtaking, the increased progress being made by most other pupils, particularly in mathematics. Teachers expect a lot from disadvantaged pupils, with no exceptions or excuses. As one leader told me, 'Disadvantaged pupils do as much work as everyone else.' Another said, 'We need pupils to expect and want the highest grades.'

With the improvement in pupils' behaviour, teachers have, in some cases, been surprised by how much more time they have to deepen pupils' learning. In particular, you have correctly identified that the most able pupils are not challenged enough. Consequently, their progress is still lagging behind that of other pupils. You have introduced a number of initiatives to inspire pupils and raise their aspirations. For example, groups of pupils attend specialist masterclasses at Roedean Academy. In addition, staff set higher targets, which has had a positive impact on all pupils, including the most able. Pupils told me that they were motivated to try harder and push themselves because their targets were so ambitious.

Programmes of extra help for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are planned carefully and are successful. Leaders know the barriers to achievement for pupils who are vulnerable. Pupils who have difficulties with mental health are supported extremely well with the right combination of pastoral care and successful teaching.

You and your leadership team have taken effective action to improve pupils' reading and writing across the school. You are wisely working on improving pupils' ability to understand what they read, in addition to increasing the number and range of books offered for study. Pupils are increasing their vocabulary in different subjects and improving their confidence in solving word problems in mathematics and science.

Governance has improved since the last inspection. Governors are challenging and astute. They know the school well, visit regularly and understand data about pupils' progress. Governors are wholly supportive of you and the school, but are not afraid to ask difficult questions about the speed of improvement.

External support

You and your leadership team benefit from the wise counsel of an experienced school improvement partner, commissioned by the local authority. Together, you check objectively the rate of improvement in the school. Visits from a local headteacher have also provided useful challenge and support for your team and governors. You encourage members of your staff team to strengthen their knowledge and skills by undertaking research projects in partnership with local schools.

Members of the strategic improvement board, including representatives from the local authority, meet regularly to review the performance of the school. You

particularly valued the strong support you had from the local authority when you carried out the review and restructure of leadership roles.

You have sensibly revitalised partnerships with your feeder primary school and your approach is having a positive impact on pupils' transition to your school. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 make a better start to their secondary school studies because staff set work at the right level.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce

Her Majesty's Inspector