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Ms Liza Leung  
Interim Headteacher  
Causeway School  
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East Sussex  
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Dear Ms Leung

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Causeway School**

Following my visit to your school on 29 November 2017, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the interim executive board are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve pupils' attendance, especially that of those who are disadvantaged.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders. I met with representatives of the interim executive board (IEB), working on behalf of East Sussex County Council, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a group of six Year 10 pupils who showed me a sample of their work. You arranged for me to meet four members of staff at different stages of their careers. I reviewed leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and examined the extensive action plans. You led me on a tour of the school and we jointly observed learning in five short parts of lessons. I looked at an

extensive range of the school's documentation, particularly information about the progress and attainment of pupils currently on roll and data about attendance, persistent absence and exclusions. I examined the school's checks on those wishing to work at the school.

## **Context**

Since the inspection that judged the school to require improvement, leaders have undertaken a thorough restructuring of the staffing. As a result, 22 members of staff have left, and four new teachers joined the staff in September 2017. Four existing members of staff have extended their roles on the leadership team. The IEB has conducted a consultation on proposals for the school to become a sponsored academy in order to secure its long-term future.

## **Main findings**

You and the seconded deputy headteacher have taken steps to secure the leadership of the school. Since January 2017, there has been much less turbulence. Both pupils and staff agree that the school is a calm and orderly place now. They say that you have restored the sense of community that had been lost. Your interim appointment was made, rightly, by the IEB as it was aware of the impact of your successful leadership and management elsewhere. There are several clear examples of the impact of your work already.

- You have put in place a reliable system for tracking pupils' progress. Both staff and pupils understand the system and how it relates to the new GCSE specifications. Pupils like the information that they now receive about how well they are doing. They say that it motivates them to do their best. You are able to extract information in a variety of useful ways. This is aiding your ability to focus effort on aspects of the school's work that most need improving. Your self-evaluation summary is accurate and packed with evidence-based judgements. You know how well pupils are doing in each subject and how well different groups are performing.
- You have strengthened the leadership of each of the subject areas. This has led to improvements in the quality of teaching. There are some examples of strong practice in different parts of the school. Teachers now have a range of effective models on which to base their work. Teachers also feel that the culture has changed so that they are able to ask for help should they need it. As a result, in all the classrooms I visited, teachers were delivering well-planned lessons, questioning pupils skilfully and sharing their good subject knowledge. This better teaching has already produced better outcomes with, for example, more pupils currently on track to meet expectations related to progress and attainment.
- With other leaders, you have strengthened considerably the strategies for improving pupils' attendance. Standards are still not good enough but they are

noticeably better than for comparable periods in the past. Leaders were candid about the inaccuracy of information about attendance and persistent absence in 2015 and 2016. You also showed me helpful information about your work to reduce exclusions. The positive behaviour management strategies you put in place in January are contributing to reducing numbers of fixed-term exclusions.

- Governance has also strengthened since the previous inspection. None of the previous governors was carried forward to the new IEB. This board comprises a group of highly effective personnel who have much useful experience to offer in the service of the school. The chair of the IEB has a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school's performance, the budget and the remaining challenges. The IEB holds leaders to account for their work. The IEB is striving in partnership with the local authority and the commissioned school improvement partner to secure a lasting solution to the long-term strategic leadership of the school.
- The IEB has brought stability to the school. This means that teachers are better able to concentrate on increasing rates of progress for individuals and groups of pupils. You support staff by providing teachers with clear targets for their pupils. You have also reset expectations about pupils' behaviour in lessons and about conduct around the school. Consequently, most lessons now proceed uninterruptedly with pupils taking an active interest in what they are learning. The quality of the sample of work seen was impressive. Books are generally well presented, with work set out neatly. Pupils are beginning, once more, to take pride in themselves and their work.
- Pupils told me that they appreciate the community atmosphere in the school. I observed them including admirably pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They are highly respectful of each individual person.
- The biggest single challenge that the school faces is attendance. Too many pupils are absent too often. Your team showed me impressive data about the reduction in absence, over time. Nevertheless, rates of attendance, in most year groups, remain a long way below the national averages for secondary schools. Of particular concern is the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who have poor attendance. They attend even less well than their peers. This inevitably reduces the amount of productive learning time they have in school. Consequently, their outcomes lag behind those of their peers and other pupils nationally.
- Although persistent absence rates are also falling, there is still a large minority who are not responding to the reasonable measures you have put in place. Your team is working effectively with a range of agencies to reduce absence further. You ensure that parents of any pupil absent without good reason are asked to explain why their child is not at school. You have also issued fixed-penalty notices as a last resort. Crucially, you are determinedly working to ensure that the overall effectiveness of the school improves, so that pupils are inspired and motivated to be present.

## **External support**

You have been ably supported on the journey by representatives of the Swale Academies Trust. Notably, you have received coaching and mentoring for your role as headteacher by the executive headteacher and director of secondary education from the trust. This has been reinforced with help from an experienced consultant headteacher who is a member of the IEB. The impact of this guidance is seen in the confidence with which you lead the school, the positive attitudes of pupils to you and other leaders, and the improvements overall to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Middle leadership has been strengthened and enhanced by specific training and support that middle leaders have for their roles. The local authority has worked closely with you and the IEB on financial matters. This has led to a realistic appraisal of the budget. You have received expert support for your attempts to improve attendance from the East Sussex Behavioural Advisory Service and a part-time education welfare officer.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**