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Sarah Speedie
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Dear Ms Speedie

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Causeway School

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- develop the school's curriculum to ensure that it is coherently planned and sequenced so that pupils are able to know more and remember more.
- ensure that pupils have secure knowledge and understanding of the key stage 3 curriculum before embarking on key stage 4.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers and two members of the interim executive board (IEB), including the chair, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with two representatives of Swale Academies Trust. I made short visits to a few lessons with subject leaders. I looked at some pupils' work.

I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans. I examined the school's single central record of background checks on adults working in the school.

Context

Several changes have occurred since the section 5 inspection took place a year ago. A restructuring took place to reduce the leadership team from September 2019. The headteacher at the time of the last inspection is now an executive headteacher for two days a week. A new head of school took up her post in September. The deputy headteacher at the time of the last inspection moved elsewhere and an assistant headteacher was promoted to deputy. A new assistant headteacher started in January. The local authority has commissioned an additional leader to work at the school from January to June.

The governance of the school remains under an Interim Executive Board (IEB), appointed by the local authority. Plans are in place for the school to join Swale Academies Trust (SAT) before the end of the academic year.

Main findings

After the last inspection, school leaders were faced with the following imperatives: improve outcomes and attendance, develop the curriculum and improve the quality of teaching. Leaders and IEB members prioritised raising pupils' achievement. There is a sharp focus on improving pupils' preparation for GCSEs and for pupils lower down the school to meet ambitious targets. To enable pupils to be successful, leaders have taken effective steps to raise teachers' expectations and, more recently, improve pupils' attendance. The development of a well-planned curriculum has been a lower priority but is now under way. Leaders need to make sure that subject plans build securely on what pupils know and can do. The head of school had identified that the curriculum needs to support pupils' literacy and reading better than it has done up to now.

By the end of the summer term there were some improvements in pupils' attendance, although it was still too low. The GCSE results showed higher attainment in English and mathematics, but pupils' progress across the curriculum remained well below national levels. There is a comprehensive improvement plan in place to support the current Year 11 pupils prepare for their GCSEs. This is monitored closely, and where it is not having the desired effect, a different approach is used. It is clear that leaders and teachers are working hard and taking appropriate actions to help pupils who have fallen behind to catch up.

Since September, staffing has been stable, and the vast majority of teachers are subject specialists. During the inspection, I met capable subject leaders from a range of subjects who show consistent leadership of their teams. The leadership of mathematics has been strengthened. Leaders and staff have benefited from well-

targeted training, including how to improve their teaching skills. Despite these strengths, the pace of improvement slowed during the autumn term. IEB members recognised the need for action and appointed a new assistant headteacher and an additional temporary leader from January. This additional leadership capacity provided new impetus for improvements across all of the priorities.

The new leader with responsibility for behaviour and attendance has strengthened systems to improve attendance. There has been some rapid impact, although there is still much to do. The leader is working effectively with the special educational needs coordinator to improve the behaviour and attendance of some of the most vulnerable pupils. There are positive early signs, for example there are fewer fixed-term exclusions.

In order to raise the expectations of both pupils and teachers, leaders introduced a new approach to teaching and learning. This encourages pupils to aim high and attempt challenging tasks. In the classes I visited, the atmosphere was productive, and pupils are keen to do well and reach their targets. However, in order to show ambition, some pupils attempt more difficult tasks before they have the necessary building blocks in place. Sometimes teachers do not check carefully enough that pupils have remembered and fully understood what they have learned before moving on. Teaching needs to adapt to ensure that the right knowledge is always embedded in long-term memory to enable pupils to perform more complex tasks.

Leaders have ensured that pupils in key stage 4 now study a wide range of subjects. Currently, pupils follow the key stage 3 national curriculum for two years and choose options for GCSE at the end of Year 8. In some subjects, teachers are using Year 9 to help pupils transition to the rigours of GCSE courses. However, many pupils join the school in Year 7 with lower than average starting points in literacy and numeracy and have difficulty learning the key stage 3 national curriculum properly within two years. IEB members and leaders have acknowledged that the organisation of the curriculum needs to change, so that pupils are better prepared to embark on GCSE courses.

External support

The local authority supports the school by appointing an IEB to govern the school. Members of the IEB use their expertise to challenge leaders rigorously and offer appropriate support and guidance. They monitor the impact of leaders' actions closely. The local authority has provided additional funding to temporarily increase leadership capacity to support improving outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning.

Although the school is not yet a member of SAT, an executive headteacher from SAT works at the school two days a week to provide advice. Staff at Causeway School benefit through the professional development provided by trust networks.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the 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

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector