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23 January 2015

Mrs Jan Hatchell  
Headteacher  
Riverwalk School  
South Close  
Bury St Edmunds  
Suffolk  
IP33 3JZ

Dear Mrs Hatchell

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

Following my visit to your school on 22 January 2015, 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 November 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 recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- carry out an external review of governance as soon as possible
- finalise a single school improvement plan with the measures for success clearly defined.

During this inspection, I asked additional questions to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of Suffolk local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

### **Evidence**

I discussed the action taken since the previous inspection at meetings with you and the two acting deputy headteachers, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body with three other governors, the assessment leader and a curriculum leader, and on the

phone with a local authority adviser. The school improvement plan and post-Ofsted action plan were evaluated. I scrutinised the single central record of checks for staff's suitability to work with children, and the recording of restraints. I went into classrooms on both sites to look at records of students' work and observed students arriving at the South Close site.

I gave formal feedback on the inspection findings to you and three members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and six other governors, and a representative from the local authority.

## **Context**

The deputy headteacher left at the end of the autumn term. Two senior members of staff are appointed as acting deputy headteachers until the end of the summer term 2015. This change led to revised roles and responsibilities for senior and middle leaders. Plans for the school to move to a new site continue to gain momentum, with some changes for September 2015 and full relocation by September 2017.

## **Main findings**

The senior leadership team, the governing body and the local authority adviser can identify no barriers to the school's ability to move forward quickly to make sure that students make good progress. The things identified for improvement at the November 2014 inspection are agreed as the right priorities and the senior leadership team wasted no time in getting on with the changes needed. Immediate action was taken to improve the arrangements for safeguarding students:

- Checks on staff's suitability to work with children are now appropriately recorded. The revisions that you made to the record have been checked by the Chair of the Governing Body and a local authority adviser.
- You provided staff with clear guidance about how to record restraints. Records are now appropriately detailed and you check that records are completed in line with the agreed time periods stated.
- Arrangements to make sure that students arrive and depart safely across the car park are suitable and strictly adhered to. A health and safety officer from the local authority recently audited the arrangements.

A lot of work was done quickly and collaboratively with staff to improve the quality of teaching and assessment. Staff are keen to improve their performance. It is too early to measure the effect of the changes on students' performance but, since the beginning of the spring term, the following well-considered things are in place:

- The assessment leader changed the way that targets are set and analysed. Assessments will be entered into the system three times each year and additional measures are in place to track students' progress towards long-term targets and to triangulate the findings.

- Information in students' *Learning Journeys* now provide useful, frequent examples and assessments of what students can do.
- A simple, effective marking system to show students how much they have learned or how well they complete written work is in place across the school. Staff and students like the new system.
- Having reflected on the points for improvement in the November 2014 report, staff identified that the curriculum does not help teachers to plan for students' different needs and abilities sufficiently. As a result, a well-thought-through alternative is being tried out in one of the classes.

There are two action plans in place, with unnecessary duplication. The plan set up specifically to address the points for improvement in the November 2014 report is unhelpful in the way that it sets out actions, responsibilities and checks. Although currently being reviewed, with some areas incomplete, the school improvement plan provides a suitable format to address the priorities alongside longer-term developments. The plan has defined some clear measures for success but needs more, particularly relating to specific improvements for students' academic progress. In addition, the range of measures does not yet include enough views of students, their families or other relevant partners.

Governors acknowledge the need to increase their challenge to school leaders but they have not yet commissioned an external review of the governing body's work or skills of its members. Having discussed their responsibilities, the committees have been restructured. Their next meeting will discuss how to gain first-hand information about the school's work when governors visit. There is more work to do to so that governors play a full role in checking the quality of the school's work.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The November 2014 report identified that local authority advisers have not visited the school frequently enough to offer sufficient challenge or to know the school's performance well enough. Half-termly visits will now take place. The local authority took immediate action to check the arrangements for safe use of the car park and a report from the recent health and safety audit is imminent.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority