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28 January 2013

Mrs C Abbott
Headteacher
Great Barr School
Aldridge Road
Great Barr
Birmingham
B44 8NU

Dear Mrs Abbott

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Great Barr School, Birmingham

Following my visit to your school on 25 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 on 8 November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a group of Year 11 and Year 12 students and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2012, the context of the school has remained broadly the same. A deputy headteacher has retired and there has been a consequent adjustment of roles in the senior team.

Main findings

Senior school leaders have written an action plan that addresses fully the areas for improvement raised in the November 2012 inspection report. Specific actions have been chosen that should bring about the necessary improvement rapidly. Helpful intermediate targets will help both senior leaders and governors check progress with the plan. The governing body has established a working group that meets monthly to monitor the progress of the plan, and its minutes show that its members are perceptive in their challenge of the school's leaders. The governing body has commissioned extra support from an improvement partner to make sure that it has independent advice on the progress with the action plan.

The major issue arising from the Ofsted report was the provision for mathematics. Senior school leaders have established a link with a school in a neighbouring authority with a track record of success in mathematics. With its assistance new schemes of work for mathematics were introduced in January 2013 for Key Stage 3 accompanied by tracking booklets that enable students, their parents and their teachers to follow the progress that students are making. The school is running evening sessions for students and their parents to explain the revised assessment systems in mathematics, the support that is available within school and also materials that they can access on line. Students who were interviewed expressed their appreciation for these sessions and strong confidence in the support for their progress that they receive from teachers in a wide range of subjects. The tracking enables additional support to be given to students who are falling behind their targets, and students were again very appreciative of the value of this additional support.

In early March the school has arranged for a Saturday training session for the mathematics department. In this session an external trainer will exemplify the wider teaching and learning styles that enrich and deepen learning in mathematics.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- Review the effectiveness of the schemes of work for mathematics and the new teaching and assessment approaches with external partners and HMI.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has drawn well on external support. It has made good use of the support from another school, and the local authority has helpfully brokered additional specialist support that may be called on in the future. A local authority officer has

provided useful advice for the governing body and its working group. The externally commissioned improvement partner has challenged and advised both senior leaders and the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham local authority and as below.

Yours sincerely

Robert Barbour
Her Majesty's Inspector