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Post-inspection note of visit letter – schools requiring improvement monitoring inspection visits

12 February 2013

Ms Carole Herman
Headteacher
Shenfield High School
Alexander Lane
Shenfield
Brentwood
CM15 8RY

Dear Ms Herman

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Shenfield High School

Following my visit to your school on 11 February 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 in 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 members of the senior leadership team, the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector met with a group of students and visited a number of lessons briefly, accompanied by the headteacher. The school action plan was evaluated. The school's record of recruitment checks on staff was also scrutinised.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new subject leader for mathematics has been appointed. The job description of the Year 7 progress leader has been fully revised with the aim of avoiding a 'dip' in the performance of Year 7 students. A 'Stretch and

Challenge' co-ordinator has also been appointed. A new marking policy has been implemented, and the behaviour policy has been re-launched.

Main findings

The school action plan incorporates most of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. The plan now needs to identify, more clearly, how progress will be monitored and include clear indicators of success. There is no specific reference to how governors will challenge more rigorously and hold school leaders to account for the performance of students. Senior leaders have been given responsibility for bringing about improvement, and it is essential that they are held to account for this by the headteacher and members of the governing body.

Senior leaders took immediate action to implement a new marking policy which offers clearer guidelines to students on how to improve the quality of their work. This appears to be becoming embedded, but not all students respond to their teachers' comments. Revision sessions in mathematics have recently started for around 70 students in Year 11. Visits have taken place to a local school with a view to improving the quality of the geography provision. A behaviour policy has been re-launched, but students told the inspector that not all teachers use this consistently.

Members of the governing body have formed a core group, with the purpose of monitoring progress against the action plan on a monthly basis. In December 2012, a governor monitoring visit, that had already been scheduled took place, but the outcome of the section 5 inspection allowed governors to focus more on the areas identified as requiring improvement. Hence, they visited lessons with a focus on challenge, matching the work to the needs of learners and the extent to which students were engaged in their learning. More recently, a similar visit took place which also involved a discussion with students. These discussions provided governors with essential information on what students think about the quality of teaching they receive.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take 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:

- amend the action plan so that all of the areas for improvement are clearly addressed, including how progress will be measured and at what times during the year
- monitor the impact of new systems and procedures on an on-going basis, for example, the revised behaviour policy to ensure consistent application by all teaching staff
- hold senior leaders to account for the impact they are having in driving up standards.

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

External support

The school values the support provided by a national leader in education. A Quadrant Commissioner from Essex County Council has also worked with senior leaders to ensure their judgements on the quality of teaching are sound. Support has also been provided to gain a deeper understanding of information of students' academic performance. Useful discussions have also taken place about an alternative staffing structure.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector