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24 March 2013

Mrs Sarah Burns
Headteacher
Sandbach School
Crewe Road
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 3NS

Dear Mrs Burns,

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

Following my visit to your school on 22 March 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and the deputy headteacher, the head of the science department and members of the governing body. I also looked at a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. I also examined the work in a sample of students' books so that I could assess the quality of marking.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the governors have appointed a deputy headteacher who will join the school immediately after the Easter break. You have reviewed the science department's management structure. The proposed new structure makes clear what individual post holders within the department are responsible for and clarifies their level of accountability.

Main findings

Since the inspection you and your team have put in place a comprehensive system for checking the quality of teaching. You have identified where classroom practice requires

improvement and provided training and support for those teachers in need of professional development. Teachers are now more accountable for the quality of their work and the standards achieved by their students.

You have introduced a new marking policy across the school. Where the marking is of high quality students know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. However, this policy is not used consistently by all teachers and the marking in some students' books is unhelpful.

When evaluating students' achievement senior leaders rely too heavily on examination results at the end of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. They do not give enough consideration to the progress students' make in Years 7 to 9. You have revised the school improvement plan in the light of the recent inspection. There is now an emphasis on addressing the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. However, action planning to address each of the targeted areas is not sharp enough. For example planned actions do not have precise time scales. There is also a lack of milestones and success criteria against which governors can measure the impact of the actions being taken.

Staff in the science department have responded positively to the outcomes of the inspection and are working effectively tackle the area for improvement linked to their subject. The recently appointed head of department has brought energy and enthusiasm to the role and with it raised expectations of what students can achieve.

Since the inspection governors have held a joint planning day with senior leaders to agree the school's development priorities. As a result they have a clear understanding of the direction that the school is taking towards moving to good.

You, your senior colleagues and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following my visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- embed the school's marking policy; making sure that all teachers give high quality feedback to their students
- include information about the progress made by students in Key Stage 3 when evaluating how well the school is doing in raising achievement overall
- refine action plans so that they include time scales, milestones and success criteria so that governors are able to measure the impact of activities taken to improve the school.

External support

The governors have effectively employed the services of a number of consultants to help support plans to improve the school. Since the inspection this support has been tailored to meet the school's most pressing needs, particularly in improving the quality of teaching in science.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector