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18 April 2013

Mrs Judith Walker
Headteacher
Knowsley Park Centre for Learning
Knowsley Park Lane
Prescot
Merseyside
L34 3NB

Dear Mrs Walker

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Knowsley Park Centre for Learning

Following my visit to your school on 17 April 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 February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and had a tour of the school. I met other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body, and two representatives of the local authority. The school development plan, key performance indicators and draft post-inspection action plan were evaluated. I talked with a group of subject leaders and two groups of students covering all years at the school.

Context

Since the last inspection in February, governors have agreed to pursue academy status as part of a group, other school or schools in the group to be decided. A new National Leader for Education is working with the school.

Main findings

After an unsettled time of anticipated falling rolls coming about and staffing changes, a common feeling amongst the people I met was that the school has reached a more settled time to make possible an absolute concentration on improving students' progress, and getting to a point where lessons are almost all good or outstanding.

To bring about that focus you have acted swiftly to draft a post-Ofsted plan. Actions in it are right and necessary, like those in the main school development plan and performance indicators document. An early positive effect of plans is in literacy, especially reading, where school evidence shows reading ages are improving.

A next step is to bring the plans together into a streamlined form with a sharper focus on impact on students' progress and on improving the effectiveness of teaching where this is not yet consistently good. Clear success criteria and evidence term-by-term will also help governors to increase their scrutiny role.

You and senior leaders understand the school well and there is a growing acceptance amongst middle leaders that expectations have gone up, both nationally and in school. There are appropriate systems in place to monitor and improve teaching but not enough evidence is used, as yet, to show the impact of teaching on students' progress over time.

Governors have set up a new Scrutiny Panel to meet staff with responsibilities and better hold them to account. Governors accept that they have not had as much training as they would like recently and that updating would help them to challenge as well as support.

Students in both key stages had a clear grasp of what helps them to progress in learning. The many examples they gave could be summed up as four things: teachers encouraging students to ask questions if they do not understand at first and giving clear explanations; realistic examples that bring learning points to life; swift marking that says what the student has done well and gives specific advice about next steps to do better; work with partners to support each other's learning. Their view was that behaviour is better when more is expected of learners in these ways. Students were well-informed about their targets.

In meetings and the tour of the school, students were friendly and courteous. They said that they feel safe in school and do not know of any 'no go areas' for them, including toilets.

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 as below.

- As you intend, bring plans together into one. When doing this, put actions in date order with more detail about expected impact for students, including baselines / starting points and measurable success criteria for each significant step. Report regularly (at least half termly) to the governor's panel and include a copy to me.
- Project plans to improve teaching and learning in targeted subjects should specify evidence about progress to be gathered, starting points and success criteria.
- When heads of subject departments meet together, use data that compares the progress of students across subjects in every meeting so that it becomes the norm.
- Three people from the school including the Chair or his representative will attend the Ofsted seminar for all schools requiring improvement in recent inspection on 29 April. This will contribute to streamlining plans.

- Governors would benefit from development on the changing role of governing bodies in monitoring and accountability. We agreed that I could start with process with an evening development session on 30 April.
- On a later visit I will focus on students' progress, working with middle leaders on a day of 'pupil tracking'. We talked about how this would involve a sample of students and a range of evidence such as written work that term, assessments, discussion with each student about what they have learned, and going into their lesson with them.

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

External support

Support from the local authority has been effective. Before the present headteacher was in place, the local authority used their powers of intervention to ensure the school had leadership in which they were confident. The school improvement service has brokered appropriate support from good and outstanding schools. The authority has provided extra funding to support extra coaching with students to improve examination results. Other services in the authority have advised on finance and personnel, and inclusion service has helped the school's attendance to improve to near national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey
Her Majesty's Inspector