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David James
The George Eliot School
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CV11 4QP

Dear Mr James

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to The George Eliot School

Following my visit to your school on 3 May 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 13-14 February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During my visit, I held meetings with you, the Chair and other members of the local governing body, and representatives from the Midlands Academy Trust. The school's post-inspection action plans were examined. Revised policies and records for safer recruitment and personnel management were scrutinised. Visits were made to classrooms and the inclusion centre.

Context

Since the inspection, a new deputy headteacher has been appointed from an Ofsted-graded outstanding school. She will join the school in September 2013 when the current deputy headteacher retires. The heads of English and mathematics have been promoted to temporary positions on the senior leadership team, again from September.

Main findings

Accepting the inspection outcomes, senior leaders made a realistic evaluation of why the school had been judged to require improvement. You have used Ofsted's data dashboard to confirm the areas where the school's performance could improve further in relation to the national picture and action plans are focussed well on these areas.

You took swift and determined action to deal with the weaknesses in recruitment and personnel management that were identified in the February inspection. A thorough overhaul of policies and procedures was completed well in advance of the 15 April deadline. Already, these revisions have proved to be effective in practice.

Students sent to the inclusion centre are being set more challenging work by subject teachers. The teaching assistants in the centre make good efforts to adapt this work to suit students' abilities, interests and needs.

All Year 7 and 8 students are participating in a commercial online phonics training programme, with positive outcomes. A small number of staff have participated in phonics training, and more is planned in partnership with a local special school. In an effective French lesson that I visited, Year 7 students were being taught to hear, speak and write new words by the teacher breaking down the words into smaller units (known as graphemes).

My tour of the school revealed a good learning environment with well-ordered and attractive displays in all classrooms, including those identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection. Lessons are planned diligently. However, in a few cases, teachers continue to be more concerned with making sure that their lessons are organised to a set template and taught using generic teaching strategies, than they are with teaching high-quality subject-specific knowledge and skills.

Senior leaders, the local governing body and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following my visit, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- increase the focus on high-quality subject-specific teaching and learning throughout the school. The Ofsted subject-specific guidance, videos, professional development resources and good practice case studies (available on the Ofsted website) may be helpful with this.

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

External support

The Midlands Academy Trust has provided good support for the school since the inspection. Concerns about recruitment and personnel management have been shared with the local authority and other agencies. Lessons learnt are being used to review practice across all of the Trust's schools.

The Trust has also worked with the school with the monitoring of teaching through lesson observations. The school is capitalising on the school leadership and inspection experience of a Trust board member. To improve this monitoring and to raise standards further, we discussed taking greater account of work samples, validated data and other information such as behaviour logs, to help evaluate the quality of teaching over time.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive of the Midlands Academy Trust.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector