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2nd May 2013

Christine Marshall
Exhall Grange School and Science College
Easter Way
Ash Green
Coventry
CV7 9HP

Dear Ms Marshall

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Exhall Grange School and Science College; Warwickshire local authority

Following my visit to your school on 26 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 December 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, six members of the Governing Body including the Chair and Vice-Chair, a representative of the local authority and a headteacher from a neighbouring school who provides the school with professional support. The school action plan was evaluated. Visits to three Year 10 mathematics lessons took place with the headteacher.

Context

Since the previous inspection two teachers have left the school. Their work is being covered on a temporary basis until permanent appointments can be made.

Main findings

The headteacher and staff responded swiftly and professionally to the findings of the section 5 inspection. Staff were quick to offer to support each other and have been flexible in altering their roles where this has been required to secure improvement. For example a member of staff who is based mainly in the primary team is now teaching some secondary mathematics lessons.

The main area that requires improvement is mathematics in Years 8 to 11, and the headteacher has sensibly focused the majority of her attention on this aspect. There are some deep seated weaknesses in the teaching and leadership in this area of the school, which the headteacher had already begun to tackle before the section 5 inspection. Since then she has increased the pace and robustness of this action while also taking steps to ensure that students receive a better quality of teaching on a day to day basis. An assistant headteacher has been temporarily put in charge of leading the department and her actions have had a good impact on the quality of teaching in some classes. Many lessons have become better structured and more appropriate for the needs of the students. Importantly, her teaching provides a good model for colleagues. In the three Year 10 mathematics lessons visited during the inspection, students were learning well. More able students in particular were confident to answer questions and to solve mathematical problems. Practical equipment was being used well by less able students to help them to learn.

Most teachers in the mathematics team are marking students' work more constructively, with positive comments about their mathematical understanding and some useful points for improvement. Where marking remains weak it consists only of a brief comment on presentation or effort. Senior leaders have identified that the way in which teachers assess students' progress in mathematics, in Key Stage 4 in particular, requires improvement as it currently lacks detail and does not aid accurate planning and tracking.

Importantly, the school has also taken a range of actions to review the quality of teaching generally and to ensure that all teaching is consistently good or outstanding. Good practice has been shared and marking has been reviewed. Teachers are marking books frequently and sometimes very constructively, but there are inconsistencies from class to class.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and have provided the headteacher with encouragement and practical support to move forward following the previous inspection. They are well organised into relevant committees. They have taken seriously the need to improve their understanding of data and have taken appropriate actions to do so. As a result they are better informed about the progress that pupils should be making, including in mathematics. Although a number of governors visit the school, they acknowledge that they do not link these visits clearly enough to evaluating the school's progress against the action plan.

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:

- improve the assessment and subsequent tracking of students' progress in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4
- agree on the purpose and format of marking pupils' work, the key elements of the marking, and how it can help pupils to improve
- review the success criteria in the action plan to ensure that all staff and governors are clear about what 'success' will look like
- ensure that governors have a clear role in monitoring the effectiveness of the school's actions to secure improvement, and use their visits to the school well to help them in this role.

HMI will:

- carry out a review of mathematics and teaching and learning in the autumn term
- provide training and support for governors if requested

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

External support

The school has drawn well on the support that has been offered by the headteacher of neighbouring school, who acts as a professional partner to the headteacher of Exhall Grange. The partner headteacher has provided high quality, tailored support. In order to help to improve mathematics, she has involved her head of mathematics, whose input is already proving to be very valuable. The local authority is committed to funding the continuation of this support as long as it is needed. The local authority has provided some telephone support for the school's ongoing complex staffing issues but has not been into school to provide more practical support. It is recommended that a meeting is arranged between the headteacher and a member of the local authority's human resources team as soon as possible.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector