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13 June 2013

Mr C Van Bussell
Headteacher
Wanstead High School
Redbridge Lane West
Wanstead
London
E11 2JZ

Dear Mr Van Bussell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wanstead High School

Following my visit to your school on 12 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, the majority of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also spoke with students informally around the school. I carried out a number of short observations of lessons with you focusing on assessment and additionally on my own, to verify your identification of where teaching is consistently good and outstanding, and where it requires improvement, in order to focus the school's support. I also reviewed the school improvement plan and other documents you made available to me.

Main findings

The senior leadership team (SLT) has responded positively to the judgement that the school requires improvement. Senior leaders now recognise that the teaching and students' achievement are not yet good because of the inconsistencies in these crucial areas of the school's business. You and your senior team talk about having

're-set the dial' as you need to raise expectations for the school, the students and all they can achieve. It was clear from our discussions and your new school improvement plan that in the six weeks since the inspection you have focused on putting in place the foundations to tackle the right things, namely: the quality of teaching; the progress and attainment of the students; and consistency in the work of the middle leaders. The plan is designed to get the school to be outstanding by the next inspection, which demonstrates the school's ambition clearly. A senior leader is identified to lead on nearly all of the actions in the plan. All actions need to be checked by one of the senior team to ensure things get done.

The school has shown a determination to build upon the many good aspects of its work to improve the consistency of teaching. There are early signs of improvement; for example, the students' books in some areas now demonstrate more effective marking over the last month. The imperative now is to ensure that this is the case in all subjects and that students are allowed adequate opportunity to respond thoughtfully to the comments made by their teachers. Some of the teachers who are highly skilled in providing oral feedback during lessons are also being used to promote this best practice, which needs to become the norm for all teachers.

You have set out to the staff clearly why it is essential that lessons are planned to cater more effectively for students of all abilities, especially the more able. The school has rightly made the sharing of teachers' planning a key focus for staff to gain a common view of what is good practice. Your newly formed teaching improvement group, tasked with providing effective coaching and guidance to improve teaching across the school is a promising step. It is vital that the group gets on with this essential work immediately - nothing is more important.

The Curriculum Team Leaders (CTLs) have pulled together well as a group since the inspection. You are raising their expectations about the essential role they have in driving up the quality of teaching and improving students' achievement. While the departmental reviews have identified areas of concern in the past, the findings have not been acted upon quickly enough. The action identified in the latest school improvement plan to improve the rigour and speed of follow up is therefore a positive step. We discussed your plans for reinstating a stronger method of holding CTLs to account, centred on effective scrutiny of teachers' work and students' progress. As a result, we agreed the recommendation set out below regarding the monthly meetings of this group with senior leaders.

The agreement among CTLs to increase the frequency and rigour of assessment in the sixth form is also positive. The plan to set and formally assess a substantive piece of work at the start of all Year 12 courses now needs to be implemented as soon as possible.

Governors are fully involved in the efforts to improve the school. They are identified as a group in the school improvement plan in playing a key role in evaluating the effectiveness of the actions. They have confidence in the senior leadership team to

drive the improvements needed and recognise their key role in holding them to account.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. As we discussed, the school should take action to:

- strengthen further the accountability of CTLs by requiring each of them to report back every three months to the formal monthly SLT/CTL group meeting on:
 - (1) the quality of teaching in their subject
 - (2) the progress and attainment of the students in each key stage, including those in the sixth form
 - (3) the resulting areas of focus in the next quarter.
- ensure that the areas of concern identified by this process are followed up and resolved quickly and effectively.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has advised the school effectively on the development of its improvement plan. It has also brokered support from two outstanding schools in the borough, specifically to support improvements in teaching and learning, and aspects of leadership and management. The school is beginning to draw on this support.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Harford".

Sean Harford
Her Majesty's Inspector

CC:

Chair of the Governing Body

Director of Children's Services, London Borough of Redbridge