

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 6799158
Direct email: rachel.dayan@serco.com



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Lynda Dobson
Headteacher
Birkbeck School and Community Arts College
Keeling Street
North Somercotes
Louth
LN11 7PN

Dear Mrs Dobson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birkbeck School and Community Arts College

Following my visit to your school on 21 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the joint Chairs of the Governing Body, and an Education Adviser from the local authority's school improvement service. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed including assessment data for Year 11, outcomes of the school's monitoring activities, and the new marking policy. A tour of the school was conducted which included brief visits to lessons.

Context

Two teachers left at Easter following the inspection. Two teachers will leave at the end of the summer term. A combination of temporary replacements and internal changes to staffing means that one vacancy remains for September 2013. As part of the re-structuring of middle leadership, four teachers relinquished their

responsibilities following the inspection. A 'leading learning team' has been established.

Main findings

As a response to the inspection feedback, leaders, governors and the Education Adviser identified three rapid improvement measures to accelerate progress. A clear strategy was established to tackle teaching that required improvement. Identified teachers have clear targets with agreed monitoring and support programmes. A second focus was to raise expectations for students and staff. Challenging targets have been set reflecting the levels of progress expected from Key Stage 2 to show good and better progress. The third action involved the re-structuring of middle leadership to create a core group to drive improvement in teaching and learning. Already there has been a strong focus on increasing the level of challenge in lessons and ensuring that teachers have a secure understanding of 'what good teaching looks like'. The expectation is that students will enjoy their lessons more and have a clear view about how each lesson is helping them to make progress. Current plans do not include ways in which students can provide feedback on how this approach is working.

These immediate actions are supported by a detailed action plan designed to tackle the areas identified for improvement. The plan provides direction and purpose and includes suitable milestones to track progress. It is less clear about who will monitor and evaluate the actions, and when progress reports will be produced for the governing body. Steps have been taken to strengthen middle leadership through joint monitoring activities. Evidence has been gathered to evaluate the effectiveness of the new marking and feedback policy. There is a growing understanding that evidence from lesson observation, progress data and work scrutiny is required to support accurate judgements about the effectiveness of teachers, departments and the school as a whole.

The governing body is ambitious for the school. This was ably demonstrated by the commitment and involvement of the joint Chairs of the Governing body in drawing up the action plan. The joint Chairs of the Governing Body are using detailed progress reports to challenge leaders, and to seek improvement through the performance management process. Not all members of the governing body visit the school or have links with aspects of the improvement plan.

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

- provide specific detail about who will monitor and evaluate the actions in the improvement plan, and when progress reports will be presented to the governing body

- explore ways of gathering feedback from students on how they are being challenged in lessons to achieve better progress
- agree a programme of visits for all members of the governing body linked to the action plan to extend knowledge and understanding of the school's work and progress.

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 Education Adviser from the local authority's school improvement service has provided effective support to the school to secure a rapid response to the inspection. In liaison with the school's leadership, support needs have been identified for specific subject areas. Specialist consultants have worked effectively in science, modern foreign languages and physical education to strengthen provision. Input to programmes designed to improve teachers' performance have been valued by the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikic
Her Majesty's Inspector