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Mr S Fox
Headteacher
Branksome Heath Middle School
Livingstone Road
Poole
BH12 3DX

Dear Mr Fox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Branksome Heath Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, students, members of the Governing Body, representatives of the local authority and the school improvement partner to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school improvement plan.

Context

The school is in the process of becoming a junior school. From September 2013, it will receive students in Year 3, but not have any students in Year 7. The school appointed a new school improvement partner recently. There will also be a new subject leader for numeracy in September.

Main findings

Your action plan has clear, measurable targets, which are regularly monitored by named staff that are responsible for each of the different areas. The governing body monitors the plan closely and challenges you appropriately about progress being achieved while also providing effective support.

You have set challenging pupil targets, which are linked to teachers' performance management. It is pleasing to see that these indicate much higher expectations on what pupils can achieve. Staff have received useful training on assessing pupils' work accurately and using the information gathered to ensure activities planned for subsequent lessons are suitably challenging. Moderation of pupils' work is now happening across the school, which is helping to ensure greater levels of consistency of teachers' judgements. You have developed a clear focus on monitoring the amount of teacher talk in lessons to ensure that students have regular and sufficient opportunities to work independently. Your recent lesson observations indicate this is beginning to have the desired impact. Students commented that they are given opportunities to work independently and that they enjoy this style of working.

Within mathematics, you have implemented investigative approaches so that pupils are challenged to think more deeply about mathematics. This is currently happening in one-off lessons. There are plans to extend this to lengthier project based activities.

You have reviewed the roles and responsibilities of your senior and middle leaders so that their job descriptions accurately reflect their work and they can be more effective in the areas they lead. This is a key development, but these staff will need strong support to ensure that they adapt quickly and successfully to their new roles. We also discussed the value in linking your school to a good or better school, which can provide high quality support and coaching for these staff. It will be important that they observe and then implement some of the good practice seen in the areas that they are leading on.

The school monitors pupils' progress regularly. This data is used well by senior and middle leaders to analyse achievement and to identify and then deploy extra help for pupils. This action is proving fruitful as the school's records show that pupils are making faster progress than previously. Through the school improvement partner, you are now beginning to bring all of the key staff together to ensure a more strategic approach is being taken to increase pupils' achievement and to deploying additional resources, which support targeted pupils. Your current data predicts a significant increase in attainment and progress in reading and writing. This is a good sign indicating positive impact of recent efforts. There is less evidence of real progress being achieved in improving pupils' achievement in mathematics. There is a need, though, to ensure that you track the proportions of pupils who are making and exceeding expected progress.

Senior leaders are working with the governing body to take action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection. These efforts are already showing some success. The school now needs to focus on:

- linking with a good or better school to observe their practice and to forge developmental working relationships between senior and middle leaders. This link needs to be firmly in place and operating by the time of my next visit
- monitor tracking data to determine the proportions of pupils making and exceeding expected progress.

We agreed that I will return to the school early in the new academic year to:

- look at the quality of your self-evaluation
- work alongside the new leader for numeracy to focus on increasing their understanding and analysis of data and subsequently planning how best to raise achievement in mathematics
- carry out some joint lesson observation with you and other staff to ensure consistency in judging the quality of teaching and to strengthen the use of developmental feedback.

External support

The school is being supported effectively by the school improvement partner. Through his work with the school, there are many new initiatives which have been either put in place or are about to be implemented. The school improvement partner has a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas to develop. The local authority monitors the work of the school improvement partner and meets twice weekly at the school to receive updates on the progress it is making.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector