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Ms R Martin
Headteacher
The Royal Docks Community School
Prince Regents Lane
Custom House
London
E16

Dear Ms Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Royal Docks Community 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, three middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was considered along with other documentation. I visited an assembly and a tutor period; I also carried out short visits to 12 lessons, accompanied by you and the three middle leaders. During these visits we looked at specific issues, including teachers' use of assessment information, and the quality of students' work and teachers' marking since the March inspection.

Context

Since March, three additional teachers have joined the school. You have decided to retire at the end of the Autumn term 2013 and the recruitment process for a new headteacher is underway.

Main findings

After initial disappointment, the inspection judgements were accepted by staff and the governing body. The school development plan was revised in light of the inspection report but was not restructured to align with the main areas for improvement. The plan acknowledges that, for the school to be judged good, significant improvements are needed in attainment and progress. However, the plan contains insufficient detail about the actions or milestones that are needed to reach this 'good' judgement.

In response to the inspection, the school has new systems to collect and monitor assessment information. Teachers have applied these systems diligently. They are making much more use of data to demonstrate the progress that they believe students are making. You are predicting better examination results for the current Year 11 cohort. However, you recognise that a large amount of intervention has been given to these students, with much less attention given lower down the school. Sampling of tracking data alongside exercise books and work seen in class revealed some significant mismatches between the standards reported by teachers and those demonstrated in students' work. While there were exceptions, too many of the exercise books seen during our lesson visits were scruffy and unkempt. Although some students join the school with very low standards of literacy, the presence of persistently poor presentation, graffiti and doodling in work books suggests poor engagement with learning. Comparison of students' work and teachers' marking before and since the March inspection show insufficient improvement. We agreed that a future visit by HMI could usefully include a thorough scrutiny of work in books, specifically to track students' progress over time.

The commitment and loyalty of governors was demonstrated through their good attendance at the feedback meeting following my visit. It is, however, very disappointing that the recommended external review of the governing body has not taken place. It is equally concerning that the governing body has only recently been able to discuss and contribute to the post-Ofsted school development plan. Comments and discussions at feedback suggested that, for the school to improve, governors require a deeper understanding of performance information. They must also ask more challenging questions about the standards of work produced in classrooms across the school. More training in interpreting data is needed for middle leaders too, particularly in understanding how to monitor and report on the effectiveness of the pupil premium funding for children who are looked after or who are eligible for free school meals. This includes understanding about differences in achievement at GCSE. It was heartening to note, however, that both governors and middle leaders demonstrated a strong hunger for making these improvements.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that there is a relentless focus on best quality work in every subject and every lesson across the school so that, over time, good progress is shown clearly in every student's books and portfolios
- ensure that teachers' assessments are accurate, presenting a true and realistic picture of students' achievements
- use Ofsted's subject resources and good practice examples to develop middle leaders' and class teachers' understanding of what represents high standards in their subjects
- ensure that governors and middle leaders are trained effectively in interpreting and understanding data, so that they can more effectively challenge the schools' performance.

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

In past years, the local authority has given considerable support through brokering and funding partnership packages with other local successful schools. School improvement partners have continued to monitor the school's work and agree that the pace of improvement since the March inspection has been too slow.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Newham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector