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Maggie Robson
Headteacher
Sackville School
Lewes Road
East Grinstead
West Sussex
RH19 3TY

Dear Mrs Robson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sackville School

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 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, the Chair and vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, and other groups of staff, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I made short visits to lessons accompanied either by a member of staff or sixth form students. I evaluated the school improvement plan and subject development plans.

Context

During the visit you informed me of staff changes at the end of the term, including your retirement as planned before the section 5 inspection, and that of one of the deputy headteachers, as well as the departure of eight other staff. The new headteacher, one of ten new members of staff joining in September, attended the feedback at the end of this visit.

Main findings

You have worked well with other senior leaders to sustain staff morale during this period of transition. The school action plan centres on the right areas of teaching and attendance, and sets challenging academic targets overall. The actions designed to bring about change are appropriate. However, it is not clear enough how progress toward long term goals will be checked for year groups, or groups such as students supported by the pupil premium, or indeed who will do the checking. Some reorganisation of the plan is also necessary to clarify which actions are about improving teaching, students' attendance or staff leadership.

You and other senior staff have begun to sharpen teachers' focus on including clear learning objectives in lessons, using information about students' attainment and progress more effectively in planning lessons, and improving marking and feedback. Staff development is better focused on the most common weaknesses in teachers' practice, and innovative strategies such as using video are poised for use as ways of improving teachers' work. You are rightly making capitalising on the good and outstanding teaching which exists in the school as a model of the way forward. The now more effective system for tracking student' progress means you are better placed to check the impact of teaching. The outcome of the inspection was a hard message for staff to hear but they accept that teaching can only be judged 'good' when it makes a 'good' impact on students' learning over time.

The steps you have taken to boost subject leaders' effectiveness are bearing fruit. Linking subjects in pairs to work more closely with line managers is helping ensure greater consistency in the way departments are led, and enabling the sharing of skills between subject leaders. They are increasingly active in curriculum planning, monitoring marking and analysing data to check students' progress. The inspection has been a catalyst for sharper analysis of the progress of different groups of students. Although subject leaders are improving their departments, they are not central enough to the process of enhancing teachers' classroom practices, and their development plans do not specify clearly how they will 'lead' teaching in their areas.

Your work to improve attendance is making a positive impact. The earlier focus by staff on students at risk of poor attendance is paying dividends. And as with teaching, data about the attendance of different groups of students is being used to better effect by staff to target their work and check the impact.

The governors have commissioned a review of their work to coincide with the arrival of the new headteacher. This is sensible timing given the new senior leadership, but the intended impact and what governors would like to achieve as a result of the review is not expressed clearly enough in the development plan. Nevertheless, the governors are acutely aware of the need to have a better grasp of students' progress and are beginning to ask more challenging questions of school leaders.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. To accelerate progress further the school should take the actions outlined below.

- Sharpen the school improvement planning so that:
 - actions are clustered into more logical groups linked to better teaching, leadership and attendance, with better achievement the ultimate impact measure
 - there are specific targets for different groups of students, such as those supported by the pupil premium
 - there are clear milestones to check progress toward long term achievement targets, and it is clear who monitors it
 - it includes the review of governance and the intended impact of this.
- Involve subject leaders more fully in improving the classroom practices of their staff.

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 recognised that the school needs more support than it have believed before the inspection. Visits have taken place from advisors in English and more are planned in other subjects. The local authority is aware of the need to pull the outcomes of these visits together and support the new headteacher during the transition next term. Some improvements to the school's action plan had been identified by the local authority but some, as outlined above, had been missed.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector