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Rob Watson
Headteacher
Stratton Upper School
Eagle Farm Road
Biggleswade
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Dear Mr Watson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stratton Upper School

Following my visit to your school on 3 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 and other senior leaders, students, eight members of the Governing Body and two groups of members of staff to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the academy action plans. I visited lessons with the deputy headteacher and with the leader of the mathematics department and observed a team meeting for the English department.

Main findings

Students report that teachers are matching the activities in lessons more closely to their needs than at the time of the last inspection, but that the level of challenge in lessons in some subjects is still too low. The last inspection judged behaviour good and it continues to improve. More lessons are meeting the needs of different levels of ability and students appreciate the enthusiasm their teachers display for their subjects. When this is the case, students behave well and disruption is rare. Nevertheless, in order for behaviour to improve further and make a very positive contribution to the progress the students make, teachers need to continue to

develop strategies that actively promote the students' ability to drive their own learning forward independently.



You gave me convincing evidence that standards are rising and that progress is accelerating. The gaps in achievement between different groups are closing. This is because the academy has increased the range of approaches to supporting their different needs. These include working with the Achievement for All programme, revising the use made of the Pupil Premium government funding and carefully monitoring and refining the way you intervene when students are falling behind. You use a wide range of data on the progress individuals are making to inform these actions and to make sure the targets that you set for students and for other aspects of the academy's work are challenging enough. You are working to reduce the persistent absence of a small number of students.

In order to improve literacy and support students who are behind with their reading, the librarian is working with tutors in Year 9, who are holding reading sessions in tutorial time, and through other initiatives. This has led to an increase in the number of books borrowed from the library. You are starting to track the impact on reading ages.

You have reviewed the targets the academy sets for the performance management of teachers. The variability in the quality of teaching is within subjects; good practice exists in all departments. You and the other senior leaders are using your knowledge of where the strengths and weaknesses lie to develop more opportunities to share the good practice and to target training and professional development more precisely. Weaknesses in marking have reduced and teachers provide good feedback to students on how to improve their work.

Priorities for development in the academy's action plans are clear and focus on the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The plans show what actions the academy will take, who will lead the work and what the impact will be. Governors are supporting the improvement work well by challenging leaders and checking the impact of their work. The plan includes references to governors' involvement; it would benefit from greater clarity on how they will carry out their monitoring role. The governing body should consider evaluating its work in line with the Ofsted guidance in order to strengthen the good challenge and support identified at the last inspection.

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

- ensure all teachers give students more opportunities in lessons to be independent and actively promote the sort of behaviour that will maximise the impact of these activities.

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

You are using well existing links with a range of other schools through local networks and as part of a consortium delivering initial teacher training to improve the quality of provision in the academy. The local authority is providing good specialist support on improving attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector