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27 September 2013

Marian Spinks
The Bromfords School
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Wickford
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Dear Mrs Spinks

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Bromfords School

Following my visit to your school on 26 September 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- make self-evaluation more precise by fully considering the impact of all actions on outcomes for students
- further strengthen the monitoring of teaching by taking more opportunities to gather information on what teaching is typically like over time
- refine improvement planning to include clear milestones by which leaders can judge whether the school is on course to move to good within the expected timescale.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. The deputy headteacher and I observed an English lesson together and you and I made brief visits to a range of other lessons. I also joined the members of the governors' curriculum committee at their scheduled meeting in order to give feedback on my findings and answer any questions they might have.

Context

Since the inspection, one deputy headteacher has stepped down and the academy is currently recruiting for a replacement.

Main findings

You have restructured the senior leadership team to allow you to focus more clearly on the priorities for improvement. This will be complete when you have recruited an additional deputy with the crucial role of managing the collection and analysis of data on the progress students are making. You have also started to set targets that are more challenging for students, but some delays in implementation have occurred while you wait for the appointment of the new deputy. Assessment is more accurate, especially in English, where teachers and the subject leader moderate their judgements together.

Some weak subject leadership is still to be addressed and there is still too much variability in the quality of teaching. Students in both the main school and the sixth form confirmed this. Monitoring of the quality of teaching does not happen often enough to give a clear indication of what it is typically like for students. This lack of precision hinders the accurate identification of the most important next steps.

Recently, leaders have instigated a system to analyse the quality of teaching to allow more personalised professional development, but this is still new and more needs to be done to share good practice. Some strategies recently planned to improve literacy have timescales in the development plan that lack urgency. Students recognise that some improvements are happening. For example, they appreciate the higher levels of challenge in the work they are given in English, PE lessons that 'push you to the limits' and strategies to improve their literacy in mathematics and science.

Attendance is slowly improving and you provided some convincing evidence of the positive impact leaders are having on reducing persistent absence. Exclusions, both internal and external are falling, but are still too high, especially for boys, whose progress lags behind that of the girls.

You and your senior leaders have ensured that staff share the vision for improvement and there are some aspects of the academy's work that are raising standards. An example is the improved way in which teachers mark students' work. Leaders have increased the emphasis on students' outcomes in performance management. Governors are undertaking an external review. The refined committee structure aims to ensure they can offer regular challenge and gain a clearer understanding of where the academy needs to improve most.

Ofsted will carry out a further visit in the spring term and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy has maintained good relationships with the local authority, which is brokering support and providing links with successful schools. The local authority is also challenging governors and assisting in their training and in the external review.

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

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector