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Mr Ben Stitchman
Headteacher
The Dormston School
Mill Bank
Sedgley
Dudley
DY3 1SN

Dear Mr Stitchman

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Dormston School

Following my visit to your school on 9 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met you and other senior leaders, a member of the governing body's school improvement committee and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Context

You took up post in September 2013. The local authority co-opted to the governing body an experienced governor who is in the process of being accredited as a National Leader of Governance. There have been no other significant changes to the context of the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

In your first weeks in post, you have introduced crucial systems and procedures to enable you and other leaders to gather detailed evidence on the quality of teaching, including marking, in all subjects. Leaders have taken quick action to support and challenge teachers when learning observed in lessons requires improvement or is inadequate. However, leaders' written feedback to teachers about how the quality of teaching in lessons supports students' achievement is not consistent in its detail. Support from colleagues in outstanding teaching schools and external consultants has already made a difference to individual teachers, as well as in identifying strategies to improve teaching and achievement in mathematics.

You have also introduced a new system for tracking students' progress to enable leaders and teachers to identify when students or groups of students are underperforming and need support. This information will also be vital in helping leaders to have a good understanding about the quality of teaching, not only as observed in lessons but in terms of its impact over time. School leaders understand that making judgements on the quality of teaching must not be based solely on lesson observations. The data analysis you have completed for the 2013 GCSE results show that there were improvements to students' attainment and progress when compared to 2012 results. However, this analysis also shows that achievement in English and mathematics in 2013 was inadequate.

The senior leaders I spoke to said that the changes you have made to roles and responsibilities have helped them to be clear about what they need to do. These leaders also described increased expectations across many aspects of the school's work, including the management of teachers' performance. These increased expectations are also clear in the school's action plan. You have prioritised a range of precise actions to tackle the significant weaknesses that exist in the work of the school. We discussed that some of the targets you have set are understandably aspirational because of students' historic inadequate achievement. As a result of our discussions, I am satisfied that you do have a realistic, but nonetheless challenging view of what can be achieved in this academic year.

An external review of governance has started and governors have established a school improvement committee, to which you report on a monthly basis. Governors have received training on data analysis and the co-opted governor has prepared some further materials to support governors in holding the school to account. By the time of my next visit, governors need to have taken quick action to further improve their effectiveness and be able to show that they are making a difference.

The local authority's statement of action, written in partnership with you, is detailed and suitably focused on improving teaching, raising students' achievement and strengthening leadership and management. The success criteria for students' achievement do not currently take into account different groups of students. Local authority officers have commissioned support from two teaching schools, and have provided further additional funding and the work of local authority consultants. Regular review board meetings will then consider the impact of this work on helping the school to improve.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector