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Mr E Wong
Headteacher
Elthorne Park High School
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Dear Mr Wong

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Elthorne Park High School

Following my visit to your school on 15 October 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- give greater prominence to improving the achievement of students eligible for pupil premium funding
- have more regular checkpoints to enable leaders, governors and the local authority evaluate the impact of the school's actions.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I spoke informally with students and I joined you in making some brief visits to lessons. I evaluated your post-Ofsted 'next steps' plan and reviewed other relevant documentation.

Context

A new special educational needs coordinator has taken up post since the section 5 inspection, and the school has appointed literacy and numeracy coordinators.

Main findings

Provisional GCSE results in 2013 have given the school a good platform to build on. The significant improvement in the proportion of students who achieved five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, reflects the impact of work which began before the last inspection and has continued since then.

The Chair of the Governing Body and yourself have both got a very clear and precise understanding of the school's emerging and existing strengths, together with the weaknesses that need to be tackled. Your passion and ambition are at the heart of the key changes in the school. You demonstrate a relentless drive for leaders and others to move up a gear. You set high but realistic expectations for what leaders, teachers and other staff can and should accomplish. This determination is equally evident in the increasingly sharp focus of governors on what is happening in the school and what needs to happen next. What is palpable is the recognition that there is no time to be lost.

You have rightly identified the key aspects which will be crucial to the school in becoming good. Leaders are ensuring that there is a stronger focus on improving the quality of learning in the classroom. You have established more formal mechanisms for holding staff and leaders to account for the impact of their work. Challenges remain in ensuring that all departments have the same positive impact on students' achievement. For example, impact is more evident in some departments, such as English, than in others, such as science.

Leaders have access to very rich and accurate whole-school data and are beginning to make better use of this. There is a greater push to ensure that teachers are using this information more precisely on a day-to-day basis to plan their lessons and ensure that all groups are making better progress. Other initiatives are also showing early signs of positive impact, for example, the heightened emphasis on marking, homework and presentation, and the initiatives to improve students' literacy skills. Initiatives in the sixth form provide students with more opportunities to sharpen their independent learning skills. The successful 'flipped learning' pilot, using online learning, enables students to prepare in advance for their lessons. This helps them and their teachers make better use of the teaching time in the lesson.

The school's action plans are very comprehensive and include all the right areas for improvement. While nothing can be left out, there is a risk that some aspects which need greater prominence are not sufficiently highlighted for all teachers. For example, despite an improving picture, not enough has been done to narrow the achievement gap between students eligible for pupil premium funding and other

students in the school. The Chair was right when she made the point while plans and milestones are important, what really counts is what happens in lessons every single day. However, while the post-Ofsted plan has clear milestones there is not enough emphasis on having shorter checkpoints to enable leaders, governors and the local authority to evaluate the impact the school's actions and make timely adjustments if required.

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 provides valuable support. For instance, human resources guidance has helped leaders to take the right action in relation to performance management. The school benefits from having a link officer who has a very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The impact of local authority support is evident in key areas, such as reviewing the quality of special educational needs provision. As a result of this and the work of the new special educational needs coordinator, there is a stronger emphasis in the classroom on the quality of learning of students with additional needs. A meeting is due to take place imminently to identify how best the local authority can direct future support. I recommend that the school engages fully with the 'securing good' programme which is being developed by the local authority, and attends Ofsted's 'getting to good' seminar later in the autumn term.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Ealing and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector