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13 November 2013

Ms Ruth Martin
Headteacher
The Royal Docks Community School
Prince Regent Lane
London
E16 3HS

Dear Ms Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Royal Docks Community School

Following my visit to your school on 12 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Since the first monitoring inspection, senior leaders and governors have taken effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 and monitoring inspections. However, there remain a number of inconsistencies that must be eradicated before the school could be considered as providing a good standard of education. The school should take further action to:

- challenge teaching that is less than good, particularly in science, mathematics and throughout the school in Key Stage 3.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and first monitoring visit. In the course of the

day, five members of the senior leadership team accompanied me on visits to thirteen lessons. The revised school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. She will take up post in January 2014.

Main findings

Since the first monitoring inspection, an independent review of governance has taken place. The governing body action plan is apposite and has given the Chair, in particular, a renewed sense of determination. The school's improvement plan is improved, too. A new Progress Board has been established, with an independent Chair; it is very helpful that the new headteacher and local authority advisers are also members of this board. Minutes of board meetings show that members are providing suitable challenge to the school about the issues preventing the school from being judged 'good'. An independent review has also been undertaken on the use of the pupil premium; consequently, the Chair of the Governing Body has a much better understanding of how this resource should be used and how its impact should be measured.

The unvalidated summer 2013 examination results show, as you predicted, a further increase in the proportion of students gaining five A*-C passes including English and mathematics. This is due in no small part to much improved results in English. The gap between standards at the Royal Docks and those achieved nationally continues to narrow, although standards overall remain below average. The performance of White British students continues to be a concern.

The senior leaders who accompanied me on visits to lessons showed a realistic understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers that we saw all demonstrated sound subject knowledge. Teachers' marking is more regular and generally more detailed, although some have not struck the right balance between writing encouraging words and making sharper, incisive points for improvement. I also noted teachers making much more accurate recording and use of data about pupils' standards. However, this realism shows, quite starkly, that students in some classes are still not making enough progress. This was particularly the case in Key Stage 3. In some classes, students' prior knowledge was not being taken account of sufficiently when planning activities. This was the case in mathematics. Pace of learning was an issue in music. In one lesson, three activities were covered at speed without any of them being properly consolidated. Meanwhile, in a neighbouring classroom, the activity was dragged-out, long-after the students had grasped the concept and made acceptable responses. Across all subjects, better use could be

made of modelling – that is, teachers showing students how to complete tasks rather than just telling them.

In some respects, the presentation of students' books has improved dramatically. In all subjects, the wrap-around sheets and plastic covers work very well. I saw no graffiti or inappropriate comments of any kind in any book – a great improvement on my last visit. In some classes, a real effort has been made to maintain a high standard of presentation. However, this is still not consistent. During visits to Year 9 science lessons, we saw examples of poor writing and presentation that reflected students' poor progress and limited engagement with learning. The quality of presentation modelled by some teachers' writing in students' science books was also poor.

The Progress Board has correctly identified the need for a more robust approach to performance management with greater and more incisive challenge where teaching is not good.

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

Local authority officers have an accurate understanding of the school's performance and capacity. Funding has been given to facilitate the external reviews, support from a Local Leader of Education, and the work of the Progress Board. The impact of this is shown in the improved action plans. However, the remaining inconsistencies in teaching and learning suggest that greater support is required with the day-to-day operation of key departments, including mathematics and science.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector