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Mr J Clarke
Headteacher
Pool Hayes Arts and Community School
Castle Drive
Willenhall
WV12 4QZ

Dear Mr Clarke

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pool Hayes Arts and Community School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 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 ensure that:

- all teachers' marking gives students precise guidance about how to improve their work and allows them time to reflect and comment on how they can make better progress
- leaders at all levels are consistently monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the progress and attainment of students and the impact of the new actions and initiatives
- leaders at all levels have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles and responsibilities
- the leadership structure effectively supports the school's work on improving the curriculum and the quality of teaching.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and other senior leaders including the new headteacher, who is due to start in January 2014, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings were held with two members of the governing body and nine students from Years 7, 9 and 11. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority. You showed me around the school and we visited a Year 7 English booster class, a Year 8 mathematics booster class, Year 8 physical education and Year 10 creative technology to look at their learning and their work. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's information about students' progress and the school action plan.

Context

You are retiring at the end of the autumn term 2013. A new headteacher was appointed in July 2013 and has been working with school leaders to ensure a smooth transition when he takes up his post in January 2014.

Main findings

Senior leaders, with the support of the local authority and the newly appointed headteacher, have acted swiftly to improve teaching, the behaviour of students at break times and the monitoring, evaluation and review of actions taken to raise standards. Information about students is now used in a more efficient and effective way to plan learning opportunities that meet the needs of individual students. A new lesson planning cycle of 'plan-do-review' has been introduced and students said that this has led to improvements in the quality of feedback given to them. However, during our visits to classrooms it was apparent that the quality of marking is inconsistent across subjects and that teachers do not always give students opportunities to act upon the advice given to them.

Students stated that behaviour in the school has continued to improve and this has helped their learning in the majority of subjects and improve the litter problems at lunchtimes. They said that this had been achieved through assemblies, tutor group activities and staff consistently applying the behaviour policy.

School leaders are now being provided with student information that should enable them to monitor, evaluate and review the progress and attainment of students. However, not all leaders carry out this aspect of their role effectively. These weaknesses in leadership have been identified by the local authority. As a result of these weaknesses some senior leaders are not contributing to the school's focus on further improving standards in the quality of teaching and in the delivery of a curriculum that meets the needs of individual students.

Actions in the new improvement plan are clear and appropriate. They address the areas requiring improvement pinpointed by the most recent inspection. Lines of accountability are clear as are the dates and timelines for implementing and reviewing the actions.

Governors, with support from the local authority, are beginning to ask searching questions of the school leaders without relying too heavily on information that is provided by the school. This challenge is ensuring school leaders are held to account for the progress and attainment of students. Governors have asked for an external review of governance to help evaluate their strengths and areas for development.

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's Partnership Review Group, whose membership includes the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority, has been instrumental in identifying the needs of the school and in employing suitable interventions and support for example the 'Achievement for All' scheme which is being funded by the local authority. This is improving the progress and attainment for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Consultant support to the school has been significant in improving leadership. However, the local authority recognises that this is still an area for further improvement. The school has recently begun to make links with local outstanding schools. The impact of this, however, is yet to be seen.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector