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12 December 2013

Mr Robert Flood
Headteacher
Harper Green School
Harper Green Road
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Bolton
Lancashire
BL4 0DH

Dear Mr Flood

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harper Green School, Bolton

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 October 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.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, a group of subject leaders, students, members of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and scrutinised other documentation supplied by the school. I undertook a learning walk with a member of the senior leadership team to observe teaching across several classes.

Context

You have indicated your intention to leave the school at the end of December. Governors have started the process of appointing a new headteacher.

Main findings

You and other senior leaders agree that the areas for improvement identified in the inspection of October 2013 are appropriate areas of focus for the school. The school's

improvement plan has been modified and now takes full account of the inspection findings. The plan is organised clearly and, where appropriate, includes clear success criteria and interim milestones to facilitate on-going review. As currently set out in the plan, a few items listed as outcomes are not sufficiently measurable and would be more usefully listed as activities that contribute towards achieving particular outcomes.

Since the October 2013 inspection, the development of teaching and learning has become an area of greater focus for the school. The senior leadership team's roles were revised in September 2013 and, at the time of the inspection, a new member of the team responsible for developing teaching and learning had been in post for only a few weeks. Subsequently, he has organised a series of targeted staff development activities, focusing on the five areas: engagement, challenge, independence, differentiation and feedback. In addition, several staff are undergoing external training at a local Teaching School to improve their skills. The impact of this training is beginning to be seen: more staff are able to use data to track, at a class level, a range of measures, such as the proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress. Students report that recent lessons include more opportunities for working in groups and learning from other students and that more teachers are using the school's marking policy of providing advice on how to improve. However, although results at KS3 have risen somewhat, forecasts for GCSE results in 2014 do not point to significant improvements on those obtained in 2013.

Through lesson observations and work scrutiny, you have evidence that the quality of teaching has improved over time. For example, the school's most recent records of lesson observations show a high proportion of good and better teaching and you are confident that the judgements are more secure than those given in the past. Records of work scrutiny indicate improvements in several aspects of teaching and assessment. The effectiveness of work scrutiny could be enhanced by recording judgements in fewer categories. For example, it may be more useful to give less emphasis to assessment so as to be more in line with the school's five identified areas of focus for developing the quality of teaching.

You recognise that, over time, there has been more variation between results in different subjects than would be expected. For example, results in English have been less strong than those in mathematics. In recognition of this, you have made sure that staffing levels in English remain high and have developed links with another local school where English is an area of strength. As a result, the English subject leader feels more confident in using data to monitor the effectiveness of the department.

Since the inspection, subject-level reviews have helped subject leaders to gauge their own effectiveness through self-review and external scrutiny. As a result, they feel more accountable and are beginning to hold individual teachers to account more for the progress of students that they teach. Additional training has been focused on the role of middle leaders in school, and a review of middle leadership in the school is planned for January. While the school's actions have begun to have an impact on the quality of subject leadership, you recognise that changes to school structures and job descriptions will be needed to strengthen further the effectiveness of subject leadership.

Governors are aware of key issues in the school, such as the need to improve teaching and ensure that the quality of subject leadership becomes consistently good or better. They were involved in the recent subject reviews and are fully committed to monitoring the

implementation of the school's improvement plan. A key priority remains the appointment of a new headteacher and arrangements to ensure that the transition period does not lead to any slackening in the drive for improvement.

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 provided support for you in reviewing the school's improvement plan. They have also brokered links with local schools and helped you to engage consultants to help develop the skills of subject leaders. The school's Collaborative Working Group, which involves local authority officers as well as consultants engaged through the local authority, evaluates provision, provides support and challenge, and monitors improvements. The local authority has provided governors with support and advice in the process of appointing a new headteacher.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers

Her Majesty's Inspector