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Mr R Gilpin
Headteacher
Pittville School
Albert Road
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL52 3JD

Dear Mr Gilpin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pittville School

Following my visit to your school on 10 January 2014, 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 the improvement plans have clear measurable milestones to check on the progress towards targets.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated and there were short visits to lessons.

Context

Since the previous inspection, an acting head of English has been appointed for one year to cover a maternity leave. You have also increased the number of 'achievement for all' workers. These are staff that provide extra tuition for groups of students and individuals as well as working in class to support students' learning.

Main findings

You have made a good start to tackling the areas for improvement identified during your recent inspection. The main priority has been to improve the quality of teaching so that more is consistently good or better.

To do this effectively, you conducted a 'fact-finding' review of teaching in November 2013. The review included input from leaders at a local school, external consultants and a representative from the local authority. This review confirmed that your senior leaders' judgements on lessons are accurate and it also highlighted the strengths in teaching at the school and the key areas for development.

You have changed the procedures for conducting some lesson observations due to a feeling that, at times, they put undue pressure on teachers. As a result, you are going to conduct a series of observations that are not associated with 'grades' but give teachers feedback on what they have done well and what would make their lesson even better. The aim is to ensure that teachers see observation as a developmental and supportive process.

Focus groups have been set up to look at developing the quality of specific aspects of teaching. These groups are made up of a range of staff, including newly qualified teachers. These groups share their findings with departments as a strategy to improve their teaching practice. These groups have been implemented to allow staff to take personal responsibility and ownership for improving aspects of their teaching.

Expectations have been rightly raised on leaders with responsibilities for departments to ensure that they monitor their departments rigorously and bring about the improvements needed. These leaders are now required to report regularly to senior leaders on aspects of their departments, including an overview of students' progress, the quality of teaching, planning and the work in students' books. As part of the evidence gathering process, they also conduct student interviews to ascertain their views. This approach is now ensuring that these leaders are routinely being held to account for their departments and are taking responsibility for bringing about improvements.

The governing body has a sound understanding of the strengths of the school and the key areas for development. They are offering effective support to senior leaders

and also have the depth of knowledge to challenge appropriately to ensure the rate of improvement is accelerating. The school's development plan identifies the key actions to bring about rapid improvement. There is a need, though, to ensure that there are measurable milestones to check on the progress toward targets.

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

Following the school being deemed as 'requiring improvement' the local authority has significantly increased the support they are offering. A half-termly project group has been established, which enables the local authority to regularly check on the progress of key priorities that have been identified. The project group is enabling the local authority to provide support which is more urgent and rigorous.

You are also accessing support from Balcarras School. They are providing strong and effective support on developing the quality of teaching and leadership at the school. There are regular opportunities for them to share their practice and to forge developmental working relationships through joint senior leadership team meetings and cross-departmental work.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector