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Michael Firth
Headteacher
Meridian School
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Dear Dr Firth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Meridian School

Following my visit to your school on 11 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the school action plan records all aspects of progress that can be measured since its implementation
- make sure all teachers implement the revised marking policy consistently
- ensure the governing body responds swiftly to any areas for development identified through the review of governance.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher, eight members of the governing body including the Chair and the Vice Chair, a representative of the local authority whose services you commission, and a group of students to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also visited a number of lessons briefly, accompanied by the deputy headteacher. I evaluated the school action plan.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the second in charge of mathematics has gained promotion elsewhere and has left the school.

Main findings

Your action plan clearly states how you aim to tackle the areas of weakness identified in the previous inspection and how often you plan to check on the impact of actions taken. You have started to measure the impact of your actions and record these, although you have omitted some important details which date back to the first two months of the plan's implementation.

You have provided relevant training to teachers in order to secure better progress for higher-attaining students, particularly in English. Your liaison work with the two main middle schools from which you recruit most of your students is ensuring that you form a more accurate picture of each student's individual starting points when they join your school so that you can set them realistic but challenging targets. As a direct result of the previous inspection, your special educational needs co-ordinator has mapped out the school's provision for every student in the school, which details more targeted support when necessary. You have sharpened your focus on monitoring the performance of different groups of students, particularly those who are higher-attaining or eligible for pupil premium funding. These groups and others in the school are tracked regularly, and frank discussions take place between senior leaders and subject leaders in relation to the rate of students' progress. Students in Years 9 and 10 are starting to make gains in their levels of literacy because of the commercial programme you are using.

You have suitably amended the form you use to record your observations on the quality of teaching so that it refers to the progress of specific groups and the effectiveness of teachers' questioning. The features of good quality teaching are discussed regularly in your teaching and learning groups, and you monitor the effectiveness of these sessions through your formal and informal observations of teaching. You are making effective use of existing expertise in the school to develop the quality of teaching. Weaker teachers are observed more regularly and provided with a support programme when necessary. Your revised marking policy is being used by the majority of teachers and students, but is not yet consistently applied. However, students in all years told me they find their teachers' comments useful in helping them to improve.

The governing body has taken on board the findings of the previous inspection and now has a designated governor linked to pupil premium funding to monitor the impact it is having on students' outcomes. Governors are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses because of the monitoring systems they have established through their sub-committees and through their visits to the school. Minutes of meetings reflect an appropriate degree of support and challenge. The review of governance has not yet taken place but is scheduled for March 2014.

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

Much of the school's external support is bought in through the local authority. The local authority's English adviser has worked well with the English department on developing students' extended writing skills. Other useful sessions have included training on interpreting data, including for the sixth form, and working with members of the governing body to ensure they ask senior leaders the right sort of questions which enable them to gain a realistic picture of the school's performance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire, the Education Funding Agency and the DfE Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector