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Ms Jo Armitage
Headteacher
Acland Burghley School
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Dear Ms Armitage

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Acland Burghley School

Following my visit to your school on 12 February 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- eradicate all instances of inappropriate behaviour, inside and outside of the classroom
- instil a greater sense of pride in the presentation and quality of students' work, including by setting much higher expectations of what students can achieve in lessons and in their books; also by example through displays around the school and in teachers' personal presentation
- appoint an independent auditor to work alongside the Interim Chair to undertake the review of governance.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the Interim Chair and two other members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. I made short visits to 17 lessons, accompanied at different times by each of the deputy headteachers. During these visits, we observed teaching and looked at students' books to consider learning over time. I also scrutinised minutes of governing body meetings, the post-Ofsted action plan and other school records. I did not consider the sixth form on this occasion.

Context

Since the inspection in September 2013, you have announced your intention to step down as headteacher at the end of August 2014. Plans are underway to recruit your successor. The Chair of the Governing Body left in October 2013. An experienced Interim Chair has been appointed, along with two new parent governors. A number of temporary teaching staff remain in post across the school. You report difficulties in making some permanent appointments.

Main findings

Information about the Summer 2013 examination results, published after the section 5 inspection, confirmed that Year 11 students' achievement was not good enough. Detailed analysis shows that particular groups underperformed, given their prior attainment at primary school. These groups included White British students, boys, those in receipt of free school meals, and those of low and middle ability. In English, students eligible for the pupil premium attained a grade and half lower than their peers. Overall, compared with what might have been expected following their Key Stage 2 results, White British students achieved nearly a whole grade lower in every GCSE subject they took.

I am in no doubt that the senior leaders and middle managers have taken action since the section 5 inspection. Your commitment to the school remains strong. However, despite some gains, the pace of improvement has not been quick enough. The post-Ofsted action plan is organised logically; it shows acceptance of the inspection findings and senior leaders' desire to improve. The plan has milestones for improvement but not enough consideration is given to the issues causing the underachievement of boys, White British students and students eligible for pupil premium funding. The school's tracking of the plan suggests that progress is too slow. Evidence from my visit confirms that the actions have not had enough impact on outcomes for students. Overall, I was disappointed by the lack of pride shown in students' books. Too many books are uncared for and poorly presented; too much work is not completed to a high enough standard. In particular, the quality of illustration and the presentation of data – for example, in science and mathematics – is too scruffy. This is the case for all groups of students, including the most able. It

was telling that, on several occasions, students apologised spontaneously for their handwriting or for the quality of their work when I asked to see their books.

The lack of pride in books is mirrored in other aspects of the school environment - for example, in corridors and display boards. Students are not required to wear school uniform. Some staff take your lead and dress in a business-like fashion. However, in other cases, teachers' attire is too casual and does not promote high professional standards or expectations.

My visits to lessons and observations around the school revealed continuing concerns with the behaviour of some students. This included answering back when challenged and talking over the teacher's instructions. I saw evidence of jostling and excessive boisterousness around the school and I heard some unacceptable language at break times. This poor behaviour was mostly by boys.

Minutes of governing body meetings show that there has been a good level of challenge to the headteacher about the 2013 examination results. Governors also recognise the need to increase leadership capacity and that the appointment of the new headteacher marks a crucial moment for the school. It is positive that the Interim Chair has instigated a comprehensive audit of governance. However, notwithstanding his expertise as a National Leader of Governance, it would be helpful to appoint an external auditor to work alongside him, to provide a completely independent opinion.

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 been robust in their challenge of the headteacher and governing body. Other support includes a recent review of progress which concluded that the school's rate of improvement needs to accelerate. This review also correctly identified continuing concerns with behaviour and with the presentation of students' work.

I am copying this letter to the Interim Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Camden, and as below.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector