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Miss Angela Wells
Headteacher
The Buckingham School
London Road
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Dear Miss Wells

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Buckingham School

Following my visit to your school on 1 April 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 December 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 all governors have the opportunity to fully consider the revised improvement plan as soon as possible so that they can play an effective role in its monitoring and evaluation
- make sure that senior leaders are consistently rigorous in the way they hold middle leaders to account.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other leaders, the Chair of Governors, and a consultant leader from Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The revised school improvement plan was evaluated.

I went on a tour with you, visiting the English, mathematics and science departments.

Context

The school is in the process of appointing an additional deputy headteacher with responsibility for achievement and the curriculum.

Main findings

You, your leaders and the Chair of Governors have shown determination to improve the school quickly. The revised school improvement plan gives appropriate priority to the areas the school needs to improve. You and your leaders review this plan regularly and you are making better use of information about students' progress to ensure your judgements are accurate.

You have rightly focused your attention on improving middle leadership. You are very clear about the crucial role senior leaders are having in improving the practice of the middle leaders they manage. You are using an external consultant to provide carefully tailored support for senior leaders to improve this aspect of their work. This is giving a clearer focus to the way that the senior team holds middle leaders to account for students' achievement, including those who are supported by additional government funding (pupil premium). Senior leaders are using the information that tracks students' progress to challenge middle leaders. They accompany middle leaders when they check students' books and the quality of teaching, using this opportunity to ask penetrating questions. All these developments are starting to sharpen the way middle leaders approach their role. You have identified that this sharper approach is not yet consistent practice within your senior team. Where senior leaders are less robust in holding middle leaders to account, students' achievement is often not as good. You have credible plans to resolve this inconsistency. In the meantime you have appropriately set up extra classes to ensure students access the support they need in the run up to external examinations.

The Chair of Governors has been closely involved in drawing up the school's plan for improvement. His educational knowledge and expertise have been used effectively to challenge leaders and train other governors. One of the governing body's committees is now charged with examining students' achievement to bring this into sharper focus. The recently revised school improvement plan clearly outlines the monitoring and evaluation that governors are scheduled to undertake. However the governors have only just seen the plan and consequently they are not yet clear enough about what they need to do individually to monitor its implementation and impact. It is important that governors now focus their attention on the key role they have in ensuring the plan works well and helps the school to become good within the timescale they have set.

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

You have brokered external support in careful consultation with the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust and the Chair of Governors. It has appropriately focused on the areas for improvement from the previous inspection report and involves a wide range of providers. All members of the senior leadership team and some middle leaders have already visited an outstanding school. Some middle leaders have used this as an opportunity to learn about good practice in their subject areas. You and your leaders are rightly checking if the external support is working and refining it where required.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard

Her Majesty's Inspector