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Will Fletcher
Acting headteacher
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Dear Mr Fletcher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Watling View School

Following my visit to your school on 10 May 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 January 2014. 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:

- make sure that the overall objectives for school improvement, together with the success criteria that will lead to good outcomes, are clearly set out in the action plan
- include the development of students' communication skills and personal development in the action plans.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the assistant headteacher, the three phase leaders, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and the Hertfordshire improvement partner. I spoke on the phone with an adviser at the local authority. I met with staff briefly and you took me on a tour of each classroom to observe students' learning. You and the assistant headteacher showed me action plans, the tracking of students' progress, staff training and the monitoring of teaching.

Context

The headteacher left at the end of the spring term and a new headteacher has been appointed to start in September. In the meantime, you and the assistant headteacher are acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher. There are no other changes in staffing or governance since the January inspection.

Main findings

Staff at all levels of responsibility are very reflective of their practice and although initially disappointed at the inspection judgements, they embraced the opportunity to interrogate their practice further. They agree that the judgements are accurate and that the points for improvement are the most important things to work on. The governing body and local authority advisers agree these things too. Discussions about how to get students more engaged in learning, particularly for literacy, started straight away, sensibly in tandem with how to record their participation more thoroughly. Staff have adapted their practice to provide stimulating and meaningful activities, and targets that focus on a wider range of skills. As a result, assessments and tracking of students' progress has improved and early signs are that students are more engaged and achieve more.

The work of the phase leaders has gained momentum. They feel well supported and are ambitious to play their part in school improvement. They are fully involved in strategic plans and frequently carry out a range of checks to monitor teaching and students' performance. Visits to other schools help the phase leaders to think about their practice and plan the next things to do.

Pupil-progress meetings are to take place for the first time in June. At first, this seems a bit late but they have been planned methodically and have been well thought through to make the best use of the time and the information available. The dates for the first meetings, which will include all students, are timed so that assessments are complete, that these are internally and externally moderated and that senior staff will already have a view about each student's performance.

The work since the January inspection has been well supported by training. There has been a lot of it and it is targeted well to what needs to be done. For example, looking at how to improve the quality of teaching was done with reference to the Teachers Standards, and improving the curriculum with specific information about good practice for students with special educational needs.

You and the assistant headteacher have taken time to refine action plans so that the areas for action are not only the right ones for the priorities but also that there are not too many targets. Action plans are good for directing the work of teachers and phase leaders and reflect the priorities well, but the strategic overview is missing. This means that monitoring and evaluating the work is not linked systematically to

the overall objectives, measurements or timescales for the improvements needed. It also means that separate action plans, such as those of the phase leaders, do not focus sharply enough on measuring the difference that their work makes to improve teaching and students' progress. In addition to this, while the focus on improving academic performance is suitably clear, it is not yet clear how students' engagement through improved communication will happen, or how students' personal development fits in.

The governors have increased their visits to school, which gives them first-hand information. A major part of their work since the January inspection has been making sure that policies and procedures are up-to-date, fit for purpose and comply with their statutory responsibilities.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I will contact the new headteacher during the autumn term.

External support

The local authority's strategy to support for schools requiring improvement is to check on their performance at least once each term. The Hertfordshire improvement partner undertook the annual assessment of the school's work in March 2014. You value the improvement partner's support and believe that additional support would be readily available if you ask for it. You make good use of external advisers to check the accuracy of your judgements and to moderate teachers' assessments of students' work. Phase leaders make good use of the links with other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector