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Mr Trevor Langston
Headteacher
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Cheshire
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Dear Mr Langston

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kings Grove School, Cheshire East

Following my visit to your school on 13 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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:

- sharpen the school improvement plan and self-evaluation
- reduce fixed-term exclusions for boys, those known to be eligible for the pupil premium and students who are disabled or have special educational needs
- ensure that all governors are secure in their understanding of school performance data.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the previous inspection. I visited a small number of lessons and also undertook a learning walk around the school. The school improvement plan and school self-evaluation were evaluated.

Context

A number of teachers have left since the previous inspection and more are set to leave in the summer. There have been new appointments to the governing body, middle and senior leadership.

Main findings

Compared to last year, students currently in Year 11 are forecast to make better progress by the end of Key Stage 4. The proportions of groups of students making expected progress in English and mathematics are predicted to be in line with national averages, an improvement upon last year. Senior leaders and the local authority are acutely aware that although this improvement in rates of progress is better it is still not good enough. There remains a legacy of underachievement from when the school was in special measures.

The leadership and management of teaching continues to improve. Many staff are involved in delivering training to their colleagues. There is some good practice in school. For example, some very helpful marking in books telling students precisely what they need to do to improve. Many Year 11 students were observed making good progress with the new head of modern foreign languages during a vocabulary test. Students who had not done well enough were told that they had to come back and re-do the test at break-time. Students showed great respect for the teacher who spoke in French throughout the lesson to good effect.

Governance has been strengthened by enlisting new governors with educational expertise. Governors are getting to know the school by visiting lessons and listening to students. However, they still do not have a secure enough grasp of school performance data to challenge senior leaders as rigorously as they should.

Middle leadership has been bolstered by some new appointments to key positions such as the heads of English and modern foreign languages. A few middle leaders have undertaken leadership qualifications through the National College of Teaching and Leadership. As a result they are now part of the extended leadership team to further boost capacity.

The leadership and management of behaviour have been strengthened with a greater focus upon basic standards. For example, mobile phones are not allowed to be used in school and teachers are expected to meet their classes at the door in order to establish high expectations before they enter the room. Attendance remains below the national average and is low for some groups. Senior leaders have missed an opportunity to improve behaviour and safety further by making it part of everyone's performance management targets.

The school's self-evaluation document is not sharp enough. It does not celebrate some of the progress that leaders and managers have made since the inspection. There is insufficient focus upon important indicators such as exclusions and attendance data for different groups within the school. The school improvement plan covers many of the key areas but it is not clear what success will look like or what progress governors expect to see. The school improvement plan targets for students' achievement are not challenging enough.

Some departments have an over-generous view of standards because the curriculum does not offer sufficient challenge. For example in physical education where, until recently, all students have taken a vocational pathway even though some of them are more able.

The mathematics corridor is light and bright with some nice displays yet some corridors in school are dull and uninspiring. The school environment needs refreshing to keep pace with senior leaders' raised expectations.

The single central record meets requirements.

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

The local authority is providing effective support for the school by paying for membership of a national network for school leaders. This has allowed them to share ideas and raise standards. Support has also been brokered with a Local Leader of Education which has strengthened senior and middle leadership. The school has engaged with Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' programme in conjunction with the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon

Her Majesty's Inspector