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Mr Nicholas Brown
Headteacher
Oldfields Hall Middle School
Stone Road
Uttoxeter
ST14 7PL

Dear Mr Brown

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oldfields Hall Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 27 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 March 2014. 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 last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to ensure:

- information on students' progress is used to plan lessons that demonstrate high expectations of what students can achieve, provide challenge for all students and fully engage them in their learning
- teachers' marking gives students precise guidance about how to improve their work and allows them to reflect and comment on how they can make better progress
- students make rapid and sustained progress in reading, writing and mathematics through rigorous and robust use of the schools' information on students' progress
- roles and responsibilities for the leadership of learning and teaching are clear.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, the Chair and three members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a Local Leader of Education (LLE) who is providing support to the school and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I was shown around the school and visited five lessons in Year 6 mathematics. During these visits I looked at the work in students' books and spoke to them about their learning. I also met with eight students from Years 5, 6, 7 and 8, 9. In addition, I reviewed the data that the school has on students' progress.

Context

You are retiring at the end of the summer term 2014. The governing body has appointed a new headteacher who will start in September 2014. One English teacher has left the school since the inspection in March.

Main findings

Senior leaders, governors and the local authority are not responding to weaknesses in students' progress, especially in mathematics, with sufficient urgency. Information provided by the school on students' progress shows that students do not make sufficient progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2, particularly in Year 5.

School leaders recognise that a number of the actions taken after the inspection in March lacked a clear focus on improving students' progress. As a consequence, the many actions taken since the inspection have had varying degrees of success.

Teaching does not ensure students make the progress expected of them. Teachers have received training on improving students' spelling, punctuation, grammar and mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding. However, it was evident during the visits to Year 6 mathematics lessons and while scrutinising the work of students, that students do not receive work that is at the right level for their ability. Students often have to repeat questions that lack challenge and do not develop their knowledge and understanding. Students say that they have to regularly work from worksheets and are expected to complete work that provides little or no challenge. There are limited opportunities for students to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and understanding. In discussions with Year 6 students it is evident that there are gaps in their mathematical knowledge that will inhibit their progress at secondary school.

The marking of students' work is inconsistent. Students say that the 'strengths, action, targets' approach used by teachers helps them to improve their work. Students also said that where teachers use the 'comfy, stretch, challenge' method, learning is more interesting. However, these approaches are used inconsistently and as a consequence students' progress is variable across subjects.

The leadership of learning and teaching is muddled. School leaders were unable to identify who had overall responsibility for improving the quality of learning and

teaching. As a consequence, school leaders do not have a clear picture of the quality of teaching in individual classes, subjects, year groups or key stages.

Governors are fully committed to the school and to the students. However, the understanding and use of information about students' achievement are inconsistent. Members of the governing body, for example, are unable to use external data to judge all aspects of the school's work.

I would like to meet with members of the governing body and the new headteacher as soon as possible in the autumn term 2014 to discuss the findings of this visit and to review the school's progress in improving the achievement of students.

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 has incorrectly judged the school's performance to be good and failed to accurately record the findings of school-based reviews in the minutes of Core Group meetings. As a consequence, school leaders and governors have not received appropriate information and support. The local authority's failure to accurately record the quality of teaching has contributed to a lack of urgency in improving the work of the school. The support from the Local Leader of Education has been effective and the reports generated by his visits correctly identify strengths and areas for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector