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25 June 2014

Mr Brian Lloyd
Headteacher
Erith Secondary School
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Dear Mr Lloyd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Erith Secondary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 June 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 March 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:

- ensure that achievement in science improves as a result of further recruitment of teachers who will teach to a consistently good standard
- ensure that improvement plans identify how leaders and governors will check that actions are making a difference and are happening quickly enough.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, a group of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body with four governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school

improvement plan was evaluated. I joined senior leaders on a tour of the school site, spoke to students informally in lessons and looked at work in their books.

Context

Since the inspection there have been a number of staff changes. All vacancies arising through resignations have been filled except for two appointments which have yet to be made. Four new English leaders have been appointed who took up their posts this term. Two other English teachers and a new literacy co-ordinator will be in post by September or before. You have strengthened the senior leadership team by recruiting a new member of staff at assistant headteacher level and reviewing existing leadership roles and responsibilities.

Main findings

The school improvement plan demonstrates that leaders have an accurate understanding of the priorities. However, timescales have not been considered well enough and you have not identified how you will measure how improvements are leading to better student achievement. This makes it difficult for leaders and governors to check that improvements are happening quickly enough or evaluate how effective actions have been.

Subject and pastoral leaders say they are clearer about their roles and responsibilities. They feel that they are held more strongly to account for raising standards. They are tracking how much progress students are making from individual starting points and checking that students entitled to the pupil premium funding and those with particular needs are supported effectively. Interventions are planned to ensure students make more rapid progress towards their targets. Closer monitoring of teaching over time and targeted training for staff is leading to better teaching in all subjects and more that is rightly judged to be at least good. The marking policy is being used more consistently to provide detailed feedback to students. Students are given time to respond to the advice they are given and therefore they make better progress. Teachers are increasingly planning lessons that take account of the agreed non-negotiable elements that you have introduced. As a result, achievement standards are rising. For example, in English, your current tracking information suggests more students are likely to reach their target grades and achieve better examination results compared to their peers last year. Standards in mathematics are also likely to improve. However, there are still concerns in the teaching of science that need to be tackled before levels of progress and attainment in science are in line with other subjects.

The behaviour policy is applied more consistently across the school. Teachers monitor and regularly report on students' attitudes towards learning. Individuals who need help to engage with their learning are quickly identified and additional support

provided. As a result, attendance rates have improved and more students are making better progress.

The governing body is offering improved levels of support and challenge to school leaders to ensure that the necessary improvements are made. Governors consider what type of information they need from school leaders to help them ask more demanding questions about students' progress and the quality of teaching. They are aware that the improvement plan needs to be reviewed and have already started to address this with school leaders. Governors ensure that they are well informed by working closely with the leaders responsible for key improvement areas. They ask leaders to report to their scrutiny and performance committee so that governors can check what difference their improvements are making. They employ external consultants to validate the judgements made by leaders. Governors are not afraid to take decisive action when the pace of improvement is too slow.

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 arranged additional support for leaders using a number of external consultants whose services have been brokered by the local authority. The training and advice they provide has helped you to make further improvements. A consultant works with teachers for three days every week to identify and support their development needs and establish peer coaching opportunities. This has improved the morale of staff who are becoming more confident as their teaching skills improve. Leaders and governors have worked closely with local authority officers to raise standards of teaching and learning across the school. You have developed links with another local secondary school. For example, you have arranged some joint training sessions for staff from both schools to share ideas and develop teaching expertise.

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

Yours sincerely,

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector