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Monday 14 July 2014

Mr Simon Weaver
Headteacher
Dagenham Park Church of England School
School Road
Dagenham
Essex
RM10 9QH

Dear Mr Weaver,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Dagenham Park C of E School

Following my visit to your school on Friday 11 July 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.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the acting Head of School Improvement for Barking and Dagenham, and the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's post-Ofsted action plan and departmental plans for English, mathematics and science were evaluated. I made short visits to 11 lessons; I was accompanied at different times by you, and by the heads of English, mathematics and science.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the senior leadership has been restructured. An additional deputy headteacher has been appointed with responsibility for assessment, the sixth form, and the English learning area. A new assistant headteacher has been appointed with responsibility for teaching and teachers' continuing professional development. The new SENCO took up post in April 2014.

Main findings

Although leaders and governors were disappointed by the outcome of the section 5 inspection, you all accepted the findings and took immediate action. The post-Ofsted action plan has clear targets, actions for improvement, and named leaders responsible for each initiative. Although governors are keeping a close eye on how the plan is progressing and senior leaders are keeping their own checks, the plan does make explicit how the actions are to be monitored.

My visits to classrooms included scrutiny of students' books to consider the effectiveness of marking since the section 5 inspection. I saw noticeable improvements, and not only in marking that was previously below expectations. Teachers who were already marking to a good standard in February have raised their game and improved their own practice further. I saw some good presentation of student work, although the layout of diagrams in mathematics and science requires improvement. While most classrooms were well-organised and purposeful, insufficient use is made of display to promote high expectations and a positive learning culture. Classrooms are bright, open and clean; but they are also clinical spaces. Too many walls are bare; where displays are made, they are too concerned with administration matters. Often, font sizes are far too small for students to read unless they are standing up close to the notice boards. Consequently, too many classrooms do not promote high quality in subject-specific learning. The one exception to this was the art department where big, bold, high quality examples of student work help to create a vibrant learning environment.

The new SENCO has correctly identified four actions needed to raise standards. First, too many students are placed on the special needs register and stay there during the whole of their time at school. Second, the curriculum offer for these students does not enable them to achieve well. Third, not enough teaching assistants are employed by the school to support students in the classroom. Fourth, classroom teachers do not have good enough understanding to challenge students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in lessons. Plans are in hand to address all four of these priorities; we agreed that significant impact is required in students' examination results to show that these have been addressed successfully. The school's predictions for the 2014 examinations suggest improvement on 2013 but, as we discussed, the predicted progress of some groups is still not good enough. This includes students with special educational needs and those from White British backgrounds.

You have changed the way that you approach monitoring of teaching, with a much greater emphasis on evaluating teaching over time. The 'Triangulation' booklet that you have produced in a handy A5 format provides very clear and very helpful guidance for staff. The booklet rightly encourages leaders to evaluate teaching over time through observations in lessons rather than making observations of individual lessons. My co-observations with the heads of English, mathematics and science showed that they are now starting to understand this principle.

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 brokered the review of governance from a neighbouring borough. This is due to be completed shortly. The local authority has also commissioned an experienced Ofsted-trained school improvement professional to work with the school's leadership. The school has engaged with West Ham United Football Club to provide an additional literacy training programme for a group of White British boys. Finally, the school is working with a consultant from another local authority to provide training for middle leaders. Although this work has started, my scrutiny of departmental plans for English, mathematics and science showed that not enough has changed since the section 5 inspection; these plans are incomplete and do not promote rapid improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector