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Dr Sean Sweeney
Action for Children, Parklands Campus
Bessels Leigh
Nr Appleton
Abingdon
OX13 5AB

Dear Dr Sweeney

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Action for Children, Parklands Campus

Following my visit to your school on 30 September 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 June 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:

- urgently apply the internet 'firewalls' and blocks that schools use to ensure students are kept safe when online
- swiftly make sure that all students know how to use the internet safely and are properly monitored when they are using computers in classrooms and in common rooms
- ensure that all staff are clear about what actions they must take if students access online material that is inappropriate
- make sure leaders have the skills to hold subject teachers to account for the quality of teaching and its impact on students' progress.

Evidence

During the inspection I held meetings with you, your senior leaders, your subject leader for mathematics and I conducted a conference telephone conversation with your Chair of Governors and a representative from Action for Children to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your most recent development plan. I made short visits to classes in the morning and afternoon accompanied by your vice principal and you respectively.

Context

A new mathematics subject leader was appointed in September.

Main findings

More is needed to move this school to good. Since the last inspection the quality of teaching has not improved quickly enough. Senior leaders do not understand well enough how to ensure planned improvements are effectively put in place.

During the visit I raised concerns with you, which you shared, regarding students' unsafe use of the internet. Students in the school have free access to video clips which have highly inappropriate content. When we visited classes in the afternoon, an older student was watching a disturbing video depicting cruelty to an animal and the assistant who was supervising him made no attempt to intervene. A student in an art class was also watching video clips with his back to the teacher who was therefore not monitoring the content of the video clips. The governors were informed of this during my telephone conversation. I have asked them to take immediate action to rectify the situation.

The development plan is incomplete and should be finished quickly because in its current state it does not help governors to hold the school to account sufficiently. The parts that are finished need sharpening up. The outcomes are not specific enough about how the actions will lead to improvements in students' achievement.

The governors have been working closely with leaders to ensure students in classes are more focused on learning. Governors have recently overseen refurbishments to provide calm, quiet spaces for students who need time to reflect. Governors have previously challenged and supported the school in its journey out of special measures. They need to hold leaders to account more rigorously for the quality of teaching and students' progress. The pupil premium review has not yet been conducted because the school was unsure as to how best to commission this review.

Although leaders are taking some steps to improve the quality of teaching, these are not having the expected impact on students' progress. This is because both middle and senior leaders are not thorough enough when they check teaching and learning. As a result, there is a gap between what leaders say is happening in classes and

what actually is. For instance, leaders have asked teachers to set targets for students' achievement and progress. When visits were made to classes, there was a high degree of inconsistency in the way teachers had undertaken this. One teacher had not yet begun the process.

In classes visited worksheets were used to occupy some students rather than to deepen their understanding and help them to practise their writing. Students were required to list effective adjectives but they did not have images in front of them to look at or objects to touch and feel. As a result the words they chose were limited and their vocabulary was not being extended by the activity. Planning does not help students make better progress because teachers are unsure of the students' goals.

Leaders are unclear about how to drive improvements in the quality of teaching across the school. Training to help teachers improve students' writing is not sufficiently based on a precise understanding of what students need to learn next. As a result it will be difficult for leaders to judge whether the training has been successful.

Coherent curriculum plans are now in place for a level 1 qualification in personal, social and health education. However, they are not being consistently followed by all teachers. The quality of learning in afternoon classes visited was too variable because too many students were involved in unstructured activities.

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 visit the school again soon to make sure that the immediate action needed has been taken.

External support

The vice principal has visited two other schools run by Action for Children. These visits helped her to gain a better view of effective teaching in similar schools. However, the visits have not helped leaders to develop a consistent and well thought-out approach to improving teaching. Leaders from Action for Children have made regular visits to the school, and recently conducted a review of behaviour. They need to visit the school more frequently to gain a better understanding of what the school needs to do to improve quickly.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [open.FREESCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk] - for academies, free schools, UTCs and studio schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school is a non-maintained special school [hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk]