

Serco Inspections
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 679 9163
Direct email: lewis.mackie1@serco.com

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Mr A Butt
Acting Headteacher
Lyndon School
Daylesford Road
Solihull
B92 8EJ

Dear Mr Butt

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Lyndon School

Following my visit to your school on 24 October 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Solihull and as below.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Improve teaching, achievement and students' attitudes to learning by making sure that:
 - all teachers use achievement data to match lesson activities effectively to the different skills and abilities of all students, particularly those of middle ability
 - marking and feedback are frequent and provide students with precise advice on how to improve their work, and students are encouraged to respond to teachers' comments
 - teachers check the progress individual students make in lessons, so they can modify the work if some students are finding it too easy or too hard
 - students are given every opportunity to write at length in all subjects when it is appropriate
 - students with hearing impairments are given work that is suitable for their needs whenever they are taught in mainstream classes.

- Raise achievement in science in Key Stage 4 by making sure that:
 - students study courses which are accurately matched to their individual levels of attainment
 - leaders improve the teaching of science to enable more students to reach the highest grades by the end of Year 11.

- Improve the impact that leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, have on students' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - all subject leaders have the knowledge and skills to improve teaching and achievement
 - the targets set for students and teachers in all subjects are challenging, particularly in Key Stage 4
 - the best teaching is shared systematically and effectively across the school.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24 October 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the acting headteacher, senior leaders, and a representative of the local authority who is the School Improvement Partner. The inspector spoke by telephone to the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector visited several lessons to sample the progress of improvement actions.

Context

In early September 2014, the substantive headteacher, with the agreement of the governing body, took extended leave. The associate headteacher was appointed as acting headteacher. A new Chair of the Governing Body took office at the same time. The local authority is investigating a number of concerns in relation to the professional conduct of some staff. Four staff left the school at the end of the summer term, and two new staff started in September 2014. Governors are consulting on the strategic future of the school with a view to becoming a sponsored academy.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school's response to its designation as having 'serious weaknesses' has not improved outcomes for students. Governors held an unduly optimistic understanding of likely student outcomes in 2014, and therefore erroneously understood that teaching was good. However, the actual results suggest that the overall attainment of students in 2014 Key Stage 4 examinations is below the national average by some margin (at 46% of students achieving five A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics, compared to 52.6% nationally using the same methodology). These students started school with average attainment overall, and have left school below average. There are some positive exceptions; for example, in English, where attainment has improved from 2013 and is in line with average. The proportions of students making expected progress in English and mathematics are similar to national figures, but the proportions of students exceeding the expected progress remain low, as do the proportions of students gaining higher grades. Science achievement declined overall.

These disappointing results triggered a major reorganisation of governance and senior leadership. The new Chair of the Governing Body supported the new acting headteacher in the swift instigation of appraisal and competency programmes to tackle long-standing underperformance of some teachers. Their rightful determination is demonstrating the necessary sense of urgency that had previously been missing. Senior staff expressed relief that 'at last' serious weaknesses are being robustly tackled. Many subjects are performing well, and their leaders want all subjects to match the achievement of the best. All subjects now have to set achievement targets based on Key Stage 2 attainment, not on the school's own

'baseline test on entry'. It is too early to see substantial impact in lessons, but the direction and rate of travel required is now clear to all staff and governors.

In response to the previous inspection, the school set up a network of internal support between teachers within faculties, and between middle managers. This training is having some impact, especially within subjects that have stable staffing. It does allow sharing of best practice between teachers, and between subjects. As yet, the improvements required by Ofsted are not embedded in the day-to-day practice of every member of staff. For example, some students' work is regularly marked well, and the students involved are responding to the personal advice given, but some work has not been marked for a month. In some lessons, tasks are both demanding and interesting, provoking an enthusiastic response from students. However, in others, the demand is far too easy, taking no practical account of students' ability.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The acting headteacher has quickly secured the loyalty of other leaders and managers in difficult circumstances through his consistent use of students' achievement over time as the key evidence of teaching quality.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There has previously been a failure of strategic leadership to act upon the apparent mismatches between teaching quality, internal assessment of students' performance and the students' day-to-day achievement in some subjects.

External support

The local authority is fully aware of the need to tackle weak teaching, which this was noted in the authority's frequent reviews that specified particular concerns. Partly because of allegedly flawed school internal assessment information, the previous strategic leadership remained convinced that weak teaching was improving and, with it, students' performance. The reality of 2014 results provided the evidence needed for urgent change. The local authority is effectively supporting the actions of the new leadership of the school, including human resources guidance in dealing with employment law. There are some school-to-school links with Tudor Grange Academy, a local teaching school. These are aimed at science but, to date, these have delivered mixed results because of on-going staff turnover at Lyndon. The local authority anticipates a period of staff stability in science in the medium term that will help improve outcomes here. The School Improvement Partner remains concerned about the low proportion of students exceeding expected progress, despite ongoing external support for mathematics. In part, this is a legacy of previous 'early entry' policy that resulted in a number of students finishing their courses in November 2013 once they had 'passed' with a grade C. They did not continue to study for the higher grades of which they were capable.