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6 November 2014

Mr Stuart McLaughlin
Principal
The Brittons Academy Trust
Ford Lane
Rainham
RM13 7BB

Dear Mr McLaughlin

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Brittons Academy Trust

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 making reasonable 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 Havering and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching so that it is always good or better, and thereby raise achievement, particularly in mathematics and science by ensuring that:
 - inadequate and weak teaching is quickly eradicated
 - all teachers have high expectations of students and use assessment information more effectively to provide lessons that closely match the needs of all students
 - students are given clear, regular and helpful feedback on their work so they know and understand how to improve.
 - improve the attitude to learning of some students by providing them with activities that engage and motivate them.
- Improve students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that good progress is made by different groups, particularly those eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
 - ensuring there is a greater focus on more-able students, by increasing the level of challenge and support and by raising expectations of staff and students.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers further by:
 - providing opportunities for teachers and middle leaders to learn from the good practice that exists in the academy and from the partner school
 - ensuring that all middle leaders carefully check the quality of teaching and students' learning and progress in their area of responsibility, and challenge staff if students are not achieving their full potential.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6 November 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the Principal and Vice-Principal, a group of middle leaders, two groups of teachers, a group of students and the Chair of the Governing Body. Telephone conversations were held with the supporting partner schools, Hall Mead, an outstanding teaching school that is led by a National Leader of Education and Redden Court, a good school judged as good at the last Ofsted inspection. A range of documents was reviewed, including the academy's performance papers, minutes of governors' meetings, the GCSE 2014 results, information on behaviour and safety of students and the updated improvement plan. The inspection looked at three aspects of the school's work: the quality of teaching; students' achievement; and the effectiveness of leaders and managers to sustain change over time.

Short visits were made to nine lessons with the Principal.

Context

Following the monitoring inspection, 13 members of staff left the academy. Their positions have been replaced by two newly qualified teachers and five experienced specialist teachers across a range of subjects. The re-structuring of the staff and the senior leadership team has been finalised.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The Principal, very well supported by the Vice-Principal and other senior leaders, has not slackened the pace of changing the culture of the academy. As a result, a range of procedures introduced at the time of the last monitoring inspection is developing well, based on the clarity of vision for improvement outlined two terms ago. This has resulted in staff, as well as students, supporting the vision. Notably, all spoke emphatically about the impact the mantra, 'PRIDE' (Perseverance, Responsibility, Independence, Discovery, Enthusiasm) has had on each person taking responsibility for self- and corporate improvement. For example, students indicated that at the start of each lesson they select and focus on one aspect of the acronym to ensure they give their best. Staff at all levels recognise that the systems of accountability have not only increased their understanding of their responsibility for students' achievement but also the consequences challenging targets not met. Line management is therefore unequivocal about better outcomes for students.

The strong emphasis on developing teaching has increased teachers' awareness of the skills required to accelerate students' progress. The catch phrase, 'every child known', is integrated into progress meetings and analysis of assessment information on students' progress. Senior leaders are therefore ensuring that line management and performance management are used well to analyse the achievement of individuals, groups and the academy as a whole. Where underperformance is noted,

support for individual teachers and students is immediately effected, progressing from basic to more intense help over a period of time. Partnership work with named schools is providing additional support for improving teaching and learning, and whilst early intervention indicates determination to share and develop good practice, it is too early to comment on the full impact.

The systematic approach to analysing assessment information means that senior leaders and staff are vigilant and adjusting their approaches to reaching the ambitious targets set for 2015. Leaders and managers use the new house system rigorously to support the process of accelerating students' progress. Students say that small tutor groups under the directors of learning and house tutors are beneficial in keeping them focused on their learning.

The governing body has increased its approach to monitoring and evaluating the academy's work. It has worked well with the local authority to sharpen its approach to challenging leaders more about the academy's effectiveness. For example, they attend challenge meetings with local officers and they have undertaken training on understanding assessment information and have developed questioning techniques. In addition, members hold specific responsibilities for the development plan. They are not reliant on the senior leaders to know about the academy's work because their duties extend to having a broad overview through their scheduled monitoring activities and representation at the senior team meetings. Consequently, decisions such as setting challenging targets and other events are known.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders have used the teaching and learning communities to develop different aspects of the Teachers' Standards. As a result, teachers as facilitators and recipients of support provided tangible evidence of the impact improved practice has had on students' achievement. For instance, students say that lessons are more engaging, challenging and well structured. They also referred to the baseline information teachers use to measure their progress over time. Inspection evidence confirms students' positive comments.
- The short visits to lessons indicated that feedback is regular and detailed, and students are rating their grasp of the skills taught in their written responses.
- Teachers know what is expected of them to raise standards further and are using the training opportunities, including visits to partner schools, coaching and peer-to-peer support, to develop their practice.
- Middle leaders are increasingly confident about their role in driving improvement. While more work is planned for next term, they have embraced the opportunities to work on assigned projects and develop their leadership skills as part of the extended leadership team within a given time frame. Training is well linked to the needs of departments, individuals and the academy as a whole.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Students' progress is not consistently good across all subjects and departments. For example, in 2014, the GCSE results did not improve significantly in mathematics, a key subject, and in design and technology. These remain a concern. While the attainment gap is closing for students receiving additional support, it is still not good enough.
- Actions outlined in the review of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils to achieve better are still being developed. Actions have still to be expedited to ensure that students receiving support can achieve well.
- Given the starting points of students when they enter the academy, teachers' expectations of what they can achieve over time still require consistency for most of them achieve good outcomes in all subjects. This is the primary challenge for the academy.

External support

The local authority's role in quality assuring the academy work, including training for governors and holding challenge board meetings, is ensuring that senior leaders are mindful of the strengths and areas of weakness. This independent review provides senior leaders with a clear steer on reflecting on, and changing, practice. For example, the training of governors to use RAISEonline (assessment information on students' achievement) means that they can focus more sharply on challenging leaders about students' progress. The support from partner schools has been particularly successful in helping staff to begin adapting and using good practice in their work.