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Ms Kathleen Higgins
Headteacher
Beechwood School
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SL2 1QE

Dear Ms Kathleen Higgins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Beechwood School

Following my visit to your school on 11 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 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:

- make sure that teachers who are newly recruited are inducted effectively and follow the school's new progress policy
- ensure that all mathematics teachers use information on students' progress to plan work that meets the needs of all students
- ensure teachers challenge sixth form students to answer questions in sentences, using Standard English, making better use of subject-specific vocabulary and with greater clarity.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your associate senior leaders, the head of sixth form, the Chair of Governors, and a representative from Cambridge Education who has been commissioned to support the school by the local authority. We visited classes in mathematics and the sixth form. I evaluated your action plans.

Context

Since the last inspection you have altered the school day and changed the curriculum so that more academic subjects are offered at GCSE.

Main findings

Since my last visit results in mathematics GCSE have dropped. There has been turbulence in the staffing arrangements in mathematics and other subjects. You have taken resolute action to ensure that despite this, the school continues to improve. For example, you have added an extra lesson to the school day. This time is wisely used to provide Year 11 with extra examination preparation. In order to tackle the county-wide difficulties in recruitment you have travelled abroad to interview teachers. To support newly recruited teachers you have written a comprehensive progress policy. This policy is clearly linked to your action plans which have been recently updated. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching of the newly recruited teachers.

You have sensibly given middle leaders the opportunity to take on whole school responsibilities as associate leaders. The associate leaders work with teachers to ensure there is greater consistency in their practice. As a result, teachers are now routinely asking students to carry out well-planned follow-up activities in response to the work they mark.

The head of sixth form has a sharp understanding of what is needed to improve results in the sixth form. She has rightly identified that Year 12 students have weak writing skills. In the sixth form classes visited, teachers were not consistently providing enough challenge to students. However, in vocational drama the teacher was challenging students to verbally express their ideas with clarity and use references to specific examples. Sixth form teachers do not routinely encourage students to talk in sentences, using Standard English with an appropriate level of formality and clarity. This is impacting on the quality of students' writing.

Teachers are using information on students' progress to make individual checks on students' understanding. However, in too many mathematics classes teachers were not using the information to plan tasks and activities that met the needs of different learners. In one mathematics class, students were all working through the same practice questions. Some students, notably boys, were struggling and their progress

was slow. Others were flying through them and could have coped with greater challenge. The activity did not help either group to make good progress.

Governors are sensibly making financial provision to support recruitment for the next academic year. The governors have changed the way they work. The achievement and standards committee meets twice each term and reports their findings at full governing body meetings. They asked the school to provide a detailed report on the examination results and used it to ask challenging questions.

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 commissioned Cambridge Education to undertake its school improvement services. A representative from Cambridge Education has carried out effective training with the governing body and bespoke training to support individual teachers. The headteacher has used her local knowledge to broker her own partnerships to support gifted and talented students. The school has had limited support from the local authority in respect of staffing and recruitment.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector