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Niall Hand
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hand

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Prendergast - Ladywell Fields College

Following my visit to your school on 9 December 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 September 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. Senior leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that the school policies for managing behaviour and marking students' work are applied consistently by all staff
- check that all staff wear their identity badges as a matter of daily safeguarding routine and school policy.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the executive headteacher, a deputy headteacher, three middle leaders, a group of governors and two representatives of the local authority to investigate the actions taken since the last inspection. You accompanied me on a short tour of the school during which we made brief visits to lessons. I

spoke with a group of Key Stage 4 students and examined some of their work with them. I evaluated the school's internal performance information, minutes of governing body meetings and the school's action plan.

Context

Since the last inspection, one teacher has left the school. A further four teachers will leave the school at the end of December 2014. Three new support staff and two teacher appointments will take up their posts between December 2014 and May 2015.

Main findings

This is a school which is taking decisive action to improve. Leaders and governors have responded promptly to the outcomes of the last inspection, and have worked together in a focused way to ensure some early improvement in most of the areas identified.

Senior leaders have an extremely clear understanding of the priorities for improvement needed in the school set out in a comprehensive action plan. The interim steps within the plan enable senior leaders and governors to thoroughly check on the school's progress. The milestone measures provide a quick progress check for all. The planned addition of a summary front page is appropriate. The plan should indicate the recent decision of the governing body to allocate formal responsibility for the monitoring of the plan to a sub-committee of three experienced governors, including the Chair of Governors.

Governors offer effective support and challenge for the school. They have responded quickly to the findings of the most recent inspection. For example, they have supported leaders by significantly increasing the amount of money the school spends on staff training, staff development and support for students' behaviour management. This has resulted in increased numbers of good or better lessons and reductions in incidents of poor behaviour and exclusion.

Governors are determined that they will continue to serve the school well. A recent, self-commissioned, skills audit of the governing body has resulted in the appointment of new governors. These new members possess complementary skills which enhance those of existing governors and further the ability of the governors to ensure robust support and challenge for the school.

The marking of students work is improving. The recently adopted policy is coherent and fit for purpose. Where it is used well, it has a clear impact on students' progress. Students appreciate these marking improvements and now know exactly what to do to improve their work in most subjects. However, not all teachers use the policy consistently or insist that students do likewise. For example, while comments on how

to improve are most often given in books, very rarely do teachers insist that such work is repeated or revised to secure the additional learning. On the occasions when this is insisted upon, students make rapid progress.

Students are motivated by the improvement in teachers' planning. Tasks are more varied, challenging and structured around the specific needs of individual students. The increased investment in staff training and development is notable. The bespoke use of good quality teaching resources is having a clear, positive impact on learning and progress in classrooms.

Behaviour throughout the school is getting better. The combination of more imaginative, better planned teaching and improving behaviour management is having its desired effect. The school's internal records show reducing levels of behaviour incidents, declining numbers of internal and external exclusions and improving punctuality. This improvement is made more sustainable by the effective use of a well-developed rewards system. Students confirmed this improvement and the popularity of the points rewards. However, during the visit, the headteacher had to constantly remind students to remove coats while indoors – a clear rule in the school's uniform policy. This was made necessary by other staff not having issued reminders and instructions previously. They should have done.

Similarly, while arrangements for safeguarding across the school are robust, many staff do not routinely wear their identity badges. This is inconsistent with the very clear school policy on the wearing of such identification.

Middle leaders are taking more responsibility for the performance of their staff teams. For example, the Science action plan mirrors the quality of the school plan. While it is not yet fully complete, it provides a clear structure by which staff in the faculty will be held to account. It is commendable that middle leaders have a clear grasp on all key performance information about their faculties. In most cases, middle leaders could evidence improving achievement and behaviour in their areas.

The significant improvement in the school's 2014 Key Stage 4 results is promising. Similarly, 2015 GCSE and BTEC predictions are very healthy, underpinned as they are by accurate and ambitious targets. The school has, rightly, taken a confidence boost from its 2014 Key Stage 4 performance.

Achievement rates for students in Key Stage 3 are also improving steadily – and for most groups. Teachers make increasingly confident use of performance targets across all subjects. This is combined with more effective planning, assessment and marking. However, gaps between the progress younger students make in English and mathematics remain too wide.

Such improvements would indicate that the school's capacity for further progress is secure.

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 school has secured access to a very wide range of well-targeted external support.

Very effective use of a number of expert consultants and partnerships is being made. These partners bring experience and knowledge which is clearly accelerating the school's improvement. For example, the Leathersellers' Federation of Schools is providing significant support to the school's work in many areas. This is making a real difference to the pace of improvement.

The support provided by the local authority is also assisting the school's progress. For example, the local authority's recent reviews of the school's action plan and the mathematics faculty provide perceptive analyses of the current strengths and weaknesses in these parts of the school. They have enabled the school's senior leaders to better plan the next improvements in these areas. However, the support lacks a formal structure. Recent reviews are inconsistent in presentation and thus mixed in their potential impact.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Lewisham.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Clinton
Her Majesty's Inspector