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11December 2014

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 11 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 second 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 now taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. Action plans are more sharply focused on making the necessary changes but lack detail about how success will be measured. The school should take immediate action to:

- train leaders in accurately evaluating the impact of whole-school developments on students' progress
- make sure teaching is developed quickly when leaders identify weaknesses.

Evidence

During the inspection meetings were held with you, your senior leaders, two of your students, your Chair of Governors and a representative from Action for Children, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Your most recent development plan was evaluated. I was accompanied by you on short visits to classes in the morning and afternoon.

Context

On the day of the monitoring visit the interim principal was leaving and the new principal was taking up his post the next day.

Main findings

The actions taken since my last visit are helping the school to improve. Leaders are clearer about the role they have in improving the school. There are now appropriate firewalls in place to keep students safe while using the internet. You monitor students' internet usage carefully and staff have been trained so they can ensure policies for keeping students safe online are properly implemented.

You and your leaders have ensured that end-of-year targets have been set for all students. Teachers have provided you with helpful information to work out whether students are currently achieving well enough to meet these targets. However this information is not used well enough to plan extra support for students who are falling behind. While some teachers are beginning to plan work that is designed to help students meet their target and learn well. This is not yet a consistent enough feature of teaching generally.

Your literacy leader has introduced an effective new approach to teaching writing. Students proudly showed me their extended writing displayed in their classroom. Two Students who found the process of writing very difficult said they are being supported more effectively. The students are clearer about the appropriate style and content for the different types of writing they do. As a result their writing is improving. However, this approach is not yet being implemented consistently. Some students who are taking GCSE English have not had enough opportunity to practise the examination skills they need to achieve their target grades and this is hindering their progress.

Students' work is being marked more regularly now. Some teachers are writing detailed comments which include subject-specific next steps for learning. One teacher had helpfully written her comments on luminous cardboard and stuck them on the students' work so they were noticeable. Students read these comments carefully and are helped and motivated by them. The use of subject-specific comments on marked work is more developed in English than in other subjects.

Some teachers and assistants are thinking carefully about how to ensure students are fully engaged. A good example of this was the work a student was doing designing a website about his hobby. This required the students to think hard about what images would promote his hobby as well as how different parts of the website might link together. Other teachers and assistants rely too heavily on computer-based learning programmes which do little more than keep students busy. In a mathematics one-to-one session on fractions the assistant missed opportunities to further a student's learning through direct teaching rather than repetitious computer

exercises which provided little challenge. As a result the student's understanding of fractions remained at a very low level.

Your improvement plan is better because it outlines the actions you intend to take in greater detail than the previous version. However, the milestones in the plan do not outline the impact of your planned actions at checking points throughout the year in enough detail. As a result some of the checks you have made to verify whether planned actions are working effectively have not been sufficiently robust.

Leaders are now more confident in training staff and developing common approaches to teaching. They regularly check whether agreed approaches are being used by teachers. While leaders recognise weaker teaching, they are not yet confident in challenging this and ensuring teaching improves.

Governors have appointed a new principal since my last visit. They have rightly made it very clear to him that he should focus on improving the quality of teaching. The Chair of the Governing Body and other governors have visited the school frequently since my last visit. Guided by a governor with significant educational experience, they have visited classrooms and developed a clearer view about where strengths and weaknesses lie. They have held the school to account for improving how effectively students are kept safe when they are online. They now receive regular updates about the students' internet usage at the school.

External Support

The director of placements from Action for Children has visited the school several times since my last visit. He has helped the school implement policies that are being used effectively in other Action for Children schools. The director of placements has ensured the new principal has undergone a thorough induction at another Action for Children School judged as effective by the Welsh inspectorate.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire 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