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Mrs Mary Morrison
The Headteacher
Bower Park Academy
Havering Road
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Dear Mrs Morrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bower Park Academy

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. Plans are not sharply focused to bring about rapid improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- set challenging targets, based on national figures, for all year groups and for all groups of learners from Year 7 to Year 11, especially in mathematics and science
- identify precise actions for all priorities to bring about rapid improvement based on measurable targets, including student progress and the quality of teaching
- demand higher expectations from teachers, so that student take much more pride in their work
- sharpen up the role of the Governing Body in monitoring and evaluating the work of leaders, so that they are better able to hold them to account

- carry out an external review of the pupil premium funding as a matter of urgency.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, and an external consultant to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and looked at teaching and learning in lessons and in students' books. I looked at the schools monitoring of teaching, the external review of the governors, the most recent headteacher's report to the governors, and the subsequent governing body meeting minutes.

Context

Since the previous inspection a new acting head of the science department has been appointed.

Main findings

The school post-Ofsted action plan includes all the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. Some of these priorities have clear and challenging targets for improvement. There is recognition that raising the achievement of Year 11 students in the core subjects is of primary importance.

However, the action plan does not identify measurable targets for all priorities, or precise actions to bring about improvements. There is insufficient detail about how the achievement of all year groups and specific groups of students will be raised in key subjects, most notably in mathematics and science. Not all teachers and heads of departments are being fully held to account for the progress students make.

You and your senior leaders told me about the training and support you have implemented so that the quality of teaching and student progress improves. You have reviewed the appraisal process to secure greater accountability of all staff. Discussions with middle leaders and teachers show that they recognise the need for improvement. You have secured their commitment to move the school forward. Staff have attended training and a workshop. Both of these focused on promoting their skills to address the areas identified as weaknesses at the time of the last inspection in the quality of teaching. However, staff do not have a good enough understanding of what they need to do to secure the necessary improvements.

You explained how leaders evaluate the effectiveness of teaching through a series of lesson observations and sampling students' work. However, records show that these observations do not gauge well enough the impact teaching has on students'

progress and learning. Feedback to teachers is not accurate enough to help them improve their practice. This is particularly so in relation to the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection.

Since the previous inspection, personal, social and health education is taught through 'blocks' of time which consist of one day each term. PSHE is the principal subject used to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, teachers do not plan specifically to foster this key aspect of students' personal development either in this subject or in other subjects across the curriculum.

The quality of students' work in books has not improved since the previous inspection. Too much work is scruffy, and presentation is often unacceptably poor. Expectations are too low. You have introduced a new marking scheme. When this is used well, students are provided with clear advice on how to improve their work. Some teachers make sure that students act upon this advice. However this is not the norm. Likewise, mathematics teachers are using a new system to check on students' strengths and next steps. This effective strategy to inform planning is not routinely used in other subject areas.

An external review of governors has been undertaken. The review highlighted several strengths but also points to a lack of challenge and impartiality in self-evaluation. In a frank discussion, the Chair of the Governing Body confirmed to me the lack of objectivity in holding leaders fully to account for their work. The action plan does not identify governors' pivotal role in evaluating the impact of leader's actions.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

Having reviewed the evidence, I am concerned about the lack of urgency in the actions being taken by the school. I would be grateful if you could inform me of the time and date of the next full governing body meeting, so that I can convey my findings to governors and answer any questions they may have.

External support

The academy has not drawn on support and advice from the local authority. Instead, leaders have brokered support from an external consultant and a school improvement partner. This support has been light touch and has had limited impact. It is disappointing that the recommended external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium has not been undertaken. In my view, this should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

I am copying this letter to 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

Mary Hinds
Her Majesty's Inspector