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Jason Christey
Acting Headteacher
King Edward VI High School
Westway
Stafford
ST17 9YJ

Dear Mr Christey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to King Edward VI High School

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2015, 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. Please pass on my thanks to everyone who gave time to speak to me.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- strengthen teaching, particularly in mathematics, to make sure that the gaps in attainment and progress between disadvantaged students and other students narrow rapidly
- set out clearly and succinctly the vision and ambition for the school. State explicitly what must be achieved in order to demonstrate that King Edward VI is a good school, and the target date to reach this point.
- make sure that the action plan contains targets for improvement in students' progress in the sixth form.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and the commissioning manager for school improvement from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The plan for improvement was evaluated and I looked at recent reports following visits from the local authority. We toured the school together and made brief visits to a number of classrooms.

Context

There have been no significant changes in staffing since the school was inspected in October. You are continuing as acting headteacher. Governors have begun the process of recruiting a permanent headteacher. The head of science is currently on sick leave.

Main findings

The pace of change has speeded up recently and there is a greater sense of urgency to the school's work. This is entirely necessary and must be sustained, because the task facing you and the staff should not be underestimated; there is a long way to go to get to good. You and other leaders have worked hard to try to change the culture in the school and to challenge staff and students to do better. Expectations of both staff and students have been raised, for example through the 'KEVI 6' statements displayed in all classrooms which set out behaviour and procedures that are non-negotiable for both.

Over the past six months, the majority of teachers have taken part in the improving teacher programme and your evaluations indicate that teaching is improving. The impact of better teaching shows in the data that you recently provided for the local authority. However, there are still wide gaps between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils, particularly in mathematics in both Year 10 and Year 11. There is also a wide gap between the attainment of girls and boys in English. Working to substantially narrow these gaps must be a key priority.

We discussed how you judge the quality of teaching and gauge its improvement. It is clear that you use a range of measures, including looking at students' work and the assessments of their progress. However, the targets for teaching in the action plan do not fully reflect this. The grade descriptions for good teaching in the *School Inspection Handbook* make clear that teaching must be consistently good, over time and in most subjects, including English and mathematics. The judgements that you and other leaders make on the overall quality of teaching must be explicitly linked to the progress that students are making, over time. A target of 90% of teaching to be good or better suggests that you would be content to have 10% that requires improvement.

You have worked to make sure there is a consistent approach to marking, the use of data to inform lesson planning and how students are challenged in lessons. You and other leaders make regular checks to see how well these procedures are working.

Systems for collecting and analysing data and for ensuring its accuracy have been strengthened. Consultants from the local authority have provided support for subject leaders.

Every student is now expected to read for ten minutes at the start of the afternoon. This is reported to be working well and is increasing students' enjoyment of reading. Work is in progress to highlight the contribution that every subject can make to improving pupils' literacy skills. The promotion of numeracy in other subjects is not as well developed. However, the most pressing need is to make sure that mathematics is taught well as a subject in its own right, in order to narrow the gaps mentioned above. I suggested that this is where efforts would be better placed for the time being.

The action plan covers the areas identified as requiring improvement in the inspection in October last year. Actions to be taken are suitable and are being implemented in a timely way. The plan includes interim 'milestones' against which improvements in teaching and in students' overall progress can be measured. The action plan does not make explicit your ambition that the school's performance will be good by the end of this academic year. Sixth-form provision was also judged to require improvement. The plan includes action to improve the advice and guidance given to students, but not for improvement in their progress on the courses they choose. This needs to be added.

The Chair of Governors knows that rapid improvement is needed. Governors understand the need to check the accuracy of information they are given, so that they are clear about the rate of progress. They have begun to hold discussions with subject leaders about the plans for raising attainment in their departments, as part of their ways of holding leaders to account. They are also more visible in school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I would be grateful if you could send me copies of your evaluations of progress with the action plan, and notes from the local authority's core group meetings, when they are available.

External support

The local authority is providing a high level of support for the school, in recognition of the need for urgency. Support for leadership from a national leader of education has been commissioned and consultants are working with subject leaders. You are also working with other external partners that you have contracted yourself.

The local authority's core group has met twice to evaluate progress and has provided accurate and helpful feedback.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector

- cc. Chair of the Governing Body
- cc. Local authority
- cc. The Education Funding Agency (EFA)