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Mr R Elsey
Interim Executive Headteacher
The Brakenhale School
Rectory Lane
Bracknell
RG12 7BA

Dear Mr Elsey,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Brakenhale School

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 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.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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:

- carry out an external review of the use of pupil premium funding.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the interim associate headteacher and headteacher designate. A meeting was held with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. With the headteacher designate, I visited several classrooms, talked to students and looked at their work. In addition, I scrutinised several school documents, including the school's single

central record of staff vetting checks. I examined students' books from across all year groups.

Context

The previous headteacher left the school in September 2014. An interim executive headteacher, the current headteacher of Edgbarrow School, was appointed full time from mid-October 2014. In January 2015 a full-time interim associate headteacher joined the school and the interim executive headteacher now works in the school for three days a week. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up her post in April. The governing body is currently undergoing a process of reconstitution and will re-form from April 2015. The senior leadership team is undergoing a significant restructure. Since the last monitoring inspection, 10 teachers have left the school and five have joined, three from an agency.

Main findings

Examination outcomes for summer 2014 did not deliver the improved results predicted by previous school leaders. Students did not make enough progress, especially in mathematics. This was particularly the case for those students who are disadvantaged.

Since your arrival at Brakenhale in October 2014, you have worked with determination to raise standards across the school. You swiftly introduced regular meetings between senior leaders and teachers to discuss students' progress. As a result, teachers are now held to account for how well their students are doing. You initiated a new system to track students' progress and have set new, more challenging targets for the achievement of current Year 10 and 11 students. The school can now identify those students needing extra support and is providing effective additional teaching and support strategies for them. For example, several whole days have recently been provided for individual options subjects to deliver intensive revision and support lessons to Year 11.

Following rigorous training backed up by external checks, teachers are now assessing students' achievement much more accurately. This means that they can now make more robust predictions than previously.

As a result of this tighter focus, students' achievement in Year 11 is improving. This cohort is on track to gain GCSE results better than the previous year. For example, the school chose to enter around 130 lower-achieving students for an i-GCSE examination in mathematics in January 2015. More than half of this group gained a C grade or above, a significant improvement from the previous year. Coursework grades in English have also improved. The gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers is closing in Year 11.

Nevertheless, work in students' books is often messy. As a result of tasks that are not challenging enough, students' work does not yet show consistently improving levels of progress across all year groups. You recognise that this is work in progress.

The school improvement plan has been redrafted. It now relates more clearly to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, it still lacks precision and dates by which actions will be taken and impact seen. Some of the ways in which success will be measured are not sharp enough and this is slowing progress down.

Work has begun on improving the quality of teaching and is starting to take effect in some areas. However, in many lessons work is still too easy for students and this is slowing their progress. Teachers do not yet all make sure that students are making rapid progress from their starting points. This reflects the fact that expectations are not consistently high enough.

The external review of governance has taken place and offered robust areas for improvement. The governing body has not previously challenged school leaders rigorously enough and is only just becoming aware of the urgent need to raise standards in the school. Members of the governing body are not aware that the school website is not compliant and that several statutory policies are not up to date. They are not able to identify how the pupil premium funding is spent on raising the achievement of disadvantaged students in the school. However, the local authority has helpfully brokered the support of an experienced governor who will join the governing body shortly.

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

Support from the local authority has strengthened since September 2014. The local authority brokered the appointments of the interim executive and associate headteachers following the departure of the previous headteacher. The local authority also provides useful support for the governing body. Work with colleagues in Edgebarrow School, a local outstanding school has been helpful for teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector