

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Tracey Burnside
Whittington Green School
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Dear Mrs Burnside

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whittington Green School

Following my visit to your school on 21 May 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2015. 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. The school should take further action to:

- finalise a policy on written feedback
- ensure students' books consistently reflect that their teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve
- amend the school action plan to list those individuals who are evaluating activities, and to make the role of governors clear.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, three senior leaders, five heads of departments, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan. You took me on a tour of the school and we visited several classrooms to see the learning that was taking place.

Context

A teacher of English has left the school since the last inspection. You have appointed a teacher of computer science who will begin at the school in September. The teacher who was acting as the head of mathematics at the time of the recent inspection has been given this role on a permanent basis.

Main findings

You and your colleagues have responded very well to the findings of the recent inspection, and you fully accept the identified areas for improvement. There is much work underway to improve the school, and some of it is beginning to have a positive impact.

You have developed a plan which is focused on the actions necessary to improve the school. The clear milestones help senior leaders and governors hold individuals to account for their work. The plan will be improved by clearly identifying those individuals who are responsible for evaluating the impact of actions taken.

Following the inspection, you reviewed the performance of all teachers. This identified more clearly those teachers whose practice requires improvement generally, and identified areas for improvement for those teachers who are judged to be good or outstanding. The support and challenge provided to teachers is more rigorous than before the recent inspection.

You have provided opportunities for colleagues to share best practice. Teachers from each department are timetabled on a weekly basis to share an aspect of good practice with colleagues. Other teachers are then encouraged to try any suitable ideas. Positive impact of this is seen through more widespread consideration of students' opinions across subjects, a strategy that was proposed through this forum.

All teachers have been trained with a view to increasing the opportunities students have to write at length. You directed teachers to plan lessons in pairs, ensuring that the outcome would be an extended writing task. You have successfully used personal, social and health education lessons to trial this approach. Your intention is to increase these writing opportunities across the curriculum. You have also used the strategy of pairing teachers to prepare lessons with a specific focus on developing challenge for more able students. Teachers then observed each other's lessons and offered developmental feedback. You will soon be able to judge the impact of this work as the evaluation of it is imminent.

The written feedback that teachers give their students is generally very good. Individual subject leaders decide on the approach to marking in their departments. In order to avoid potential confusion for students between the demands of different subjects, you should establish some common practice without compromising the bespoke feedback teachers wish to give.

The presentation of students' work is also generally good but there are still examples of exercise books which do not reflect the high expectations teachers should have. You intend to make this a more prominent feature when you judge the quality of teachers' practice.

You are working hard to raise the aspirations of the students in your care. You invited parents and their children to an evening where routes into higher education were explored. Speakers from universities attended to encourage students to think about their ambitions. The event was well received.

You developed a new policy to tackle the use of inappropriate language by students, and in doing so you sought the opinion of parents, teachers and the students themselves. Your teachers have helped students understand what constitutes inappropriate language and, in April, you introduced a 'zero tolerance' policy in this regard. A large number of sanctions followed. This number is reducing.

Senior leaders reviewed the skills of middle leaders. This has helped identify areas of development. Several leaders have accessed bespoke support from good, local schools. Middle leaders interviewed were very positive about their personal development and the improvements made on a whole school level. They feel they are now more accountable for the achievement of their students and that they are in a better position to hold their subject teachers to account for their practice.

In school data show increased rates of progress in most subjects and teachers have moderated their assessments with colleagues from several local schools.

Following the recent inspection, the governing body reviewed the school action plan. Although they understand the actions that are being taken to improve the school, governors' roles in holding senior leaders to account for their work is not defined clearly enough in the plan. The link governor for those students who have special educational needs has worked with members of staff to review the school's provision in this regard, and she has become more informed as a result.

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 local authority has provided significant funding to the school following its recent inspection, with a view to accelerating the progress that is being made. The local authority representative's view of the school is much more positive than it was a year ago due to the effective action taken by school leaders. Local authority specialists in English and modern foreign languages have helped subject leaders and teachers improve their practice. The local authority representative has also helped to arrange support for the head of mathematics from Shirebrook Academy. Four

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subject leaders are working on improving their leadership skills through a programme which is run jointly by the local authority. This has helped these leaders improve their judgements on the quality of teaching and in holding their members of staff to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian McNeilly
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
cc. Local authority