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3 June 2015

Ms Rachel Forward
Headteacher
Hardwick Middle School
Mayfield Road
Bury St Edmunds
IP33 2PD

Dear Ms Forward

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Hardwick Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 2 June 2015 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2015. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Associate Inspector

cc. Chair of appropriate authority for Hardwick Middle School
cc. Sue Cook, Director of Children's Services for Suffolk local authority

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015

- Continue the improvements made to the quality and effectiveness of teaching so that students attain higher standards, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - deliver activities that are interesting, which motivate students to want to work hard and meet their challenging targets
 - ensure that lessons and homework activities meet the learning needs of all groups of students, including disadvantaged students, less able students and the most able
 - are alert to students who need additional support, or challenge, within lessons and adapt their teaching to provide it
 - use questioning or other strategies to ensure that students can develop their ideas and responses fully
 - give students clear information about how to improve their work, and time to respond to the suggestions.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders at all levels by ensuring that:
 - teachers apply marks, levels or grades to students' work accurately
 - the quality of feedback that students receive is of consistently high quality across all subject areas
 - the impact of intervention and additional support provided to students is monitored carefully, and that changes are made as required
 - the good practice identified in the school is shared more widely to improve the quality of teaching and learning
 - governors and senior leaders evaluate how effectively the additional funding for disadvantaged students is spent, monitoring the impact of recent changes.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher and the executive headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. She observed the school's work in every year group and spoke to students about their learning.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, there have been three new appointments to the teaching and support staff. The school will close in July 2016 and senior leaders and the governing body continue to manage this process alongside their work to improve the progress and attainment of their students as they prepare to move to local secondary schools in September 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher has successfully raised the expectations of the teaching staff, who are now providing more challenge for students in lessons. Even though there is only a year left before the school closes, she is determined to drive through improvements in teaching that will accelerate the progress of students and equip them with the skills needed to succeed in the next stage of their education.

The clear procedures now in place have strengthened the role of the governing body in monitoring the work of the school. Monthly governing body meetings are preceded by sharply focused evidence gathering. This means that governors are better informed about issues such as the progress of disadvantaged students and so can more confidently hold senior leaders to account.

Subject leaders in English and mathematics are directly responsible to the headteacher for the progress of students in their areas. They use information on how well students are doing to effectively track and monitor the progress of both individuals and groups of students. However, this degree of accountability is not yet apparent in all areas of the curriculum.

Teaching is improving. Training for teachers on how to challenge students more in lessons by asking them carefully-chosen questions, and on how to plan effectively to meet the needs of all ability groups, is beginning to have some impact. The school's own monitoring indicates that standards are set to rise in Key Stage 2, particularly in writing. Small improvements in reading and mathematics are also indicated, especially in the proportions of students achieving Level 5. The school has worked hard to ensure that assessments are accurate and that information on progress and attainment is reliable. Observations in lessons and scrutiny of students' books show

that improved teaching is having an impact on how well students are learning. This is supported by evidence of accelerating progress in all year groups.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school now has established lines of accountability through governors, senior and middle leaders to classroom teachers that have raised the expectations of all and contributed to improvements in both teaching and the progress of students.
- The school's systems for the tracking and monitoring of how well students are doing are effective and robust. Teachers regularly assess how much progress their students are making and the school collects this information and analyses it to identify any individual underachievement. This year, extra support has been provided for students in Year 6 who needed to increase the pace of their progress or fill gaps in their knowledge. Tracking of their progress shows that this support has had a positive impact.
- Close analysis of students' progress also allows senior leaders to identify any patterns of underachievement so that weaknesses in teaching can be addressed.
- Teachers mark students' work promptly, regularly and increasingly effectively. Where this does not work as well, the next steps provided by teachers are not helpful or students are not bothering to respond to advice.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- In some lessons, students are not always clear about why they are doing a task, what they are learning or what skills they are being asked to demonstrate. Objectives in lessons, and for some assessed pieces of work, are not always sharply focused on what students need to do to be successful.
- Subject leaders are not yet taking advantage of the general rise in the quality of teaching to develop the subject-specific skills of teachers so that students of all abilities are suitably challenged and supported to make more rapid progress.

External support

Both senior and subject leaders speak positively of the quality of support provided by the local authority since the inspection in January. In particular, intensive support in English and mathematics has raised the expectations of teachers and strengthened assessment systems. The local authority has also provided training on adapting teaching so that lessons offer challenge to students of all abilities.

Hardwick Middle School has also drawn on support from a variety of local schools including subject specialists from King Edward VI School.