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Mrs S Havard
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Havard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Challney High School for Girls

Following my visit to your school on 8 October 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection in November 2013, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that governors get the training they need in order to hold senior leaders to account for the effectiveness of their work
- develop a coherent and focused plan of action in order to improve teaching and learning, and regularly review the impact of this plan
- ensure that teachers raise their expectations of the standards that pupils can achieve, including for the most able
- embed the teaching of high-level literacy skills across all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders, subject leaders of English, mathematics and science, the special needs coordinator, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and two governors, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated and I scrutinised documents relating to how middle and senior leaders check the work of the school, teacher training plans, records of local authority visits and departmental development plans. I also visited lessons, accompanied by you and the assistant headteacher.

Context

Three new teachers joined the science department in September 2015 and a new special needs coordinator has been appointed.

Main findings

Since the inspection in May 2015, the school has received the 2015 GCSE results, which show a substantial decline. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C fell from 55% in 2014 to 41% this year. More worryingly, the proportion of pupils making the expected progress in English and mathematics was well below that found nationally. Additionally, attainment in science has continued to decline, with GCSE results well below national averages.

Teachers' predictions for the standards pupils are working at are inaccurate. The school has not established robust systems to check that what teachers tell you about the pupils' performance is accurate. This is because, when observing lessons, senior leaders do not check on whether the work being taught is challenging and at the right level. You and your senior leaders do not challenge teachers enough on the quality of their teaching. Leaders are also not able to say what the strengths and weaknesses in teaching are, overall or by subject, because you focus on individual teachers. This means whole-school priorities are not identified and then worked on collectively.

The school development plan does not identify key priorities that everyone can focus their attention on in a coherent way. You have not put in place a clear cycle of improvement that identifies a focus for action and then reviews it to see whether the action has made a difference. Therefore, you do not know what impact your work as a leadership team has had. For example, the new special needs coordinator has put in place individual profiles for pupils, but leaders cannot articulate clearly how these have been used.

The school's plans do not focus enough on the right things. For example, there is a substantial focus on identification of most-able pupils rather than on how teachers should stretch the learning of these pupils.

Senior leaders and subject leaders are also not checking how teachers are working to raise the achievement of this group. Analysis of results does not identify this group in any detail; in some lessons, for example mathematics, the lack of monitoring means teachers' low expectations, and consequently pupils' low attainment, are going unchallenged.

For areas that the school has prioritised for itself, such as marking, your own monitoring shows inconsistency of practice. Too often books are marked in a cursory fashion, basic errors are not corrected and teachers do not have high enough expectations of the level of language that pupils of secondary age should be using. This includes teachers who have been supported by your senior leaders to improve. Excellent practice in terms of guidance for pupils exists in your school; some teachers set additional challenges, following marking, which pupils respond to with diligence, stretching their own learning. This shows what pupils are capable of when pushed, but this does not happen regularly enough.

Literacy, particularly in encouraging higher-level thinking and use of language, is poorly developed in the school and undermines improvement strategies. This must be addressed urgently for pupils of all abilities and in all subjects.

The lack of clarity around the expectations of subject leaders and training for them means their roles as leaders, sometimes of large departments, are underdeveloped. Subject leaders have to undertake formal observations with senior leaders. This suggests a lack of confidence in their abilities, which undermines their important role and means that you and your senior leaders cannot be strategic in your own roles.

Work undertaken to bring about improvement is at an early stage. In subjects such as science and English, teachers are planning together and moderating their assessments so that data are more accurate. However, your work to link targets for teachers to pupils' achievement is at a very early stage.

The governing body of the school does not have a collective vision of its role and does not play a strategic role in the development of the school. Governors are too accepting of information provided to them and do not challenge or check by other means what they are told by you. Some have an over-optimistic view of the effectiveness of the school. They lack clarity about their function and so do not know what they can question, ask for and do. They need training as a priority in their role of holding you to account.

Governors do not question the impact of external support or what difference is made by funding for specific work in the school. For example, the use of additional funding for Year 7 pupils should be reported on the school's website, but is not. There has

been very little evaluation undertaken of this even though this aspect was identified as an area for improvement. Governors have not ensured that all statutory reporting requirements are met on the school's website. This needs to be addressed immediately.

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

External support

The local authority knows the school well and has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weakness. It has provided regular support to the school and for specific subjects. However, as this support is not set within a coherent plan or around commonly shared priorities, it has had limited impact. Furthermore, neither you nor the governors have evaluated the impact of the local authority's support.

The slow pace of change in the school, the declining standards, and the lack of clarity about what needs to be done or a shared, common purpose mean the support provided by the local authority has been ineffective. It has recently proposed that a school improvement board be established.

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

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty's Inspector