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Mr Michael Gleeson
Principal
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Dear Mr Gleeson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wootton Upper School

Following my visit to your school on 19 May 2016, 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 December 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and directors (the name by which governors at the school are known) are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that teachers who are not consistently applying school policies for managing pupil behaviour do so
- provide teachers with the information and training to enable them to plan learning that precisely matches the needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Then ensure that teachers use these skills effectively.
- improve the attitude and behaviour of a small number of pupils in Year 10 who continue to misbehave.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, a number of other senior leaders, two groups of pupils, three directors, four teachers, six middle leaders and an external consultant who is working with the school to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. School documents which included improvement plans, school self-evaluation, the external pupil premium review, assessment information and governor minutes were evaluated. During three tours of the school with you, I observed pupils at work in lessons, and scrutinised their work in books and folders. I also spoke with pupils during breaktime and lunchtime.

Context

Since the last inspection two assistant principals have left their posts. You have appointed a new data manager and a temporary leader in science. Two vice-principals have been appointed and are due to take up their posts in June 2016.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders are correctly plotting a clear and sustainable journey to improve the school. You have taken great care to develop a school improvement plan that accurately prioritises the things that need to be better for the school to provide a good quality of education. Leaders are closely monitoring the progress that is being made towards your clear targets. As a result, leaders and directors know what is working well and what needs to be improved.

School leaders know the effectiveness of their teachers. Leaders are now monitoring the quality of teaching more effectively and have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the school. Teachers explained that they are being more clearly held accountable for the standards being achieved by their pupils. You are rightly challenging poorer practice and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving as a result. Staff morale is improving. Most teachers and middle leaders are supporting you as you seek to raise standards and ensure that the school is good.

Leaders also are supporting teachers to improve their practice. Teachers welcome the well-targeted training that you are providing. For example, teachers told me that the training on behaviour management is helping them to develop their classroom management skills. Pupils agree that teachers' management of pupil behaviour is better, but still not consistent enough.

You know that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is still variable. This is particularly the case in science, information technology and mathematics. While you can point to examples of better practice in each of these subjects, weaknesses in the planning and delivery of learning remain. Pupils explained that this inconsistency frustrates them and that the quality of their learning in science is still

too dependent upon the 'teacher that you get'. The learning and behaviour in these lessons is not of the high quality that you or pupils expect. This is dampening pupils' enthusiasm for learning and slowing the progress they are able to make.

Where teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do, and plan learning well, pupils show that they are capable of achieving well. This was clearly evident in the history, drama and dance lessons that we visited. Here, teachers' astute use of a range of questioning and activities both interested and challenged pupils, who were confidently able to demonstrate their technical skills and knowledge. Exceptionally positive relationships in these lessons helped learning to take place. Pupils were clear that these were among their favourite lessons as they learned more.

More needs to be done to ensure that teachers learn from the very best practice that exists in the school. You are developing strategies to enable teachers to share their good practice. Teachers have led training on both literacy and assessment. Teachers are able to give examples of where this has helped them to improve their teaching; however, you have yet to measure systematically the impact that this is having across the school.

Under the skilful and enthusiastic leadership of your assistant principal, you have made clear the standards of behaviour that you expect. Leaders have provided training to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to manage behaviour more effectively. Where these techniques are skilfully applied, there is evidence that this is working. Records show that the number of times that teachers have needed to call for assistance in dealing with poor behaviour in lessons is reducing. The number of positive behaviour awards given out by teachers is increasing. I spoke with pupils who told me how much they value the work of the assistant principal and his team in helping them make more positive behaviour choices.

Some teachers' lack of consistency in the way that they manage behaviour remains a concern for you and your pupils, and rightly so. One pupil explained that the behaviour of a small number of pupils still 'brings my learning to a halt in some lessons'. His peers agreed with him. This is more likely to be the case in lessons where there are frequent changes of teacher, or where teachers do not plan learning to meet pupils' needs well enough. This, as well as the less positive attitudes of a small number of pupils in Year 10, is reducing the impact of the good work being done to improve behaviour across the school. As a consequence, some pupils do not think that behaviour is improving quickly enough.

Leaders are making more effective use of the detailed attendance information that they are collecting. The attendance team takes appropriate action where a pupil's absence is a concern. For example, by working closely with parents through meetings and home visits there has been a significant fall in the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school.

The new data manager has taken decisive action to improve the quality of assessment information that is available to school leaders. As a result, leaders at all levels have better access to, and are more confident when using, this information to track the progress that pupils are making. The evidence seen on this inspection indicates that outcomes are improving in Years 13, 11 and 9. This is not the case in Year 10, where outcomes need to improve. The progress that disadvantaged pupils make is not improving at the rate that you would like it to. You are taking appropriate action to make sure that you put in place the recommendations of an external review of the school's use of pupil premium spending. This review clearly signposts the actions that you need to take to improve the progress that these pupils are able to make.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is still not good enough. You have correctly prioritised reviewing the school's register of pupils who need support. This work is now complete. However, information as to how these pupils' needs should be met is not easily available to teachers. As a consequence, teachers do not routinely plan learning that precisely meets the needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Teachers explained that they would welcome more training to help them with this aspect of their work. The recently completed audit of provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability provides you with an effective framework for improvement.

You are beginning to take appropriate steps to improve the quality of information, advice and guidance that pupils receive. The temporary leader of science has taken effective action to ensure that pupils are following courses that are well suited to their abilities and interests. Your careful monitoring indicates that over 90% of pupils in Year 9 feel that they have been well supported in making their key stage 4 subject choices. However, Year 10 pupils informed me that they have to wait too long for their careers interviews and they would welcome more precise guidance on their chosen courses and careers.

Directors have acted swiftly to respond to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. They are better informed and have a more accurate idea of the performance of the school. Directors no longer rely solely on information provided by senior leaders. Directors have established a local school improvement board which offers clear support and challenge to senior leaders. The directors are regular visitors to school and take account of information provided by external consultants when judging the quality of education provided by the school. As a result, directors are increasingly effective in their work.

External support

Your willingness to make good use of a range of external agencies is helping you make the improvements that are needed. For example, an external consultant is helping you to improve the quality of data that is available to school leaders. Bedford Borough Council is providing effective support in the form of resources that have enabled you to carry out reviews of how you spend pupil premium funding and

the effectiveness of the provision for special educational needs.

I am copying this letter to the Wootton Advisory Board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bedford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector