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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Craig Steel
Acting headteacher
Kibblesworth Academy
West View
Kibblesworth
Gateshead
Tyne and Wear
NE11 0XP

Dear Mr Steel

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kibblesworth Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 July 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- develop rigorous performance management systems
- ensure that the most able pupils are challenged effectively across all subjects and in all classes, including the early years
- tackle the remaining issues relating to behaviour, both within and out of lessons, identified by pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A range of documents were evaluated, including improvement plans, performance management records, safeguarding files and governors' minutes. I conducted lesson observations in all classes, other than Year 5 and Year 6, in partnership with you. I met with the early years leader as well as the English and mathematics leaders.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have assumed the temporary position of acting headteacher, following the departure of the previous headteacher in December 2015. There are two new governors. Some internal restructuring of teaching staff has taken place; the special educational needs coordinator, for example, is also now the early years leader. The assistant headteacher has been granted a temporary acting deputy headteacher post beginning in September 2016. Two new teachers have also recently been appointed and will take up post in September 2016.

Main findings

Since taking on the mantle of acting headteacher in January 2016, you have worked in a proactive manner to address those areas requiring improvement. You quickly set about revising improvement plans to ensure that the main issues were more clearly identified, measurable and being tackled with increased urgency. You have also brought about a renewed sense of teamwork and positive partnership working to the school's community. This is resulting in a purposeful, positive ethos.

Alongside governors, you are realistic and honest about what needs to be done. You have identified the correct priorities that need to be tackled in order to bring about rapid improvement. Actions are already showing a positive impact in relation to the standards reached by pupils. The proportion of pupils reaching a good level of development in the early years is rising appropriately, as is the proportion of those pupils in Year 1 achieving the required phonics standard. There are also indications that achievement in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 shows improvement across all subjects. This said, you are mindful of the need to raise the level of challenge and improve outcomes further for the most able pupils.

You and other leaders monitor teaching and learning regularly, ensuring that teachers are clear about what they need to do to improve their practice. You have afforded all teaching staff opportunities to extend or re-ignite their skills, sharing good practice both internally and also by visiting other education providers locally.

Professional development opportunities are aptly focused on the needs of the school as well as the individual. One positive consequence has been the impact on teaching and learning in writing. Teachers are enhancing the curriculum by employing wider techniques and strategies to engage and interest pupils in writing. Pupils now say they enjoy writing. You understand the need to refine aspects of the school's performance management processes further in order to hold teachers fully accountable for the progress of all groups of pupils.

The external review of governance was conducted prior to my previous monitoring inspection in December 2015. Governors are using the recommendations from the review effectively. Monitoring visits are more closely focused on burning issues. Information presented to governors has also become more precise and easier to understand and interrogate. Governors, therefore, are better placed to challenge leaders, and this they are doing. They are also aware that aspects of the school's performance management processes require additional fine-tuning to make sure that the highest standards are effectively communicated, easily measured and, ultimately, secured.

Pupils are grateful for some of the changes that you have wrought in terms of behaviour. They are particularly appreciative of the incentives and rewards now being offered, for example, the 'hound pounds'. Pupils also feel that the weekly 'Roll of Honour' and 'respect passports' have contributed to more positive playtimes. Attendance has improved overall, and the proportion of pupils missing from school on a regular basis has fallen considerably. However, discussions with pupils indicate that they remain dissatisfied with some aspects of their peers' behaviour on occasion, both in lessons and outdoors. You recognise the need to address pupils' concerns promptly.

External support

The school has reached out to the wider educational community to support its work to strengthen leadership and management and to improve teaching and learning. For example, you now regularly engage with and meet other headteachers at local 'talking heads' meetings, where you challenge, support and learn from each other. As a result, the centrality of your role in driving improvement is better understood, meaning the school's capacity for leadership is enhanced.

You have also sought opportunities to work with other schools locally to share and discuss practice, for example the teaching, learning and assessment of writing. Several cross-school sessions have taken place whereby teachers' judgements about the quality of pupils' writing have been moderated. This is securing accuracy in assessment as well as embedding appropriate expectations in terms of outcomes for pupils across year groups. As a result of these endeavours, positive partnerships in the wider educational environment are developing well.

The school is also drawing on support from the local authority. Local authority improvement partners have been involved in supporting aspects of the school's work. Leaders and governors have found the termly steering group meetings particularly helpful in strengthening the school's strategic direction. However, the most recent review of the school's work by the local authority is overly generous and thereby has the potential to detract from emerging strengths identified during this inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gateshead. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector