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Ms Kim Garland
Brimsham Green School
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Dear Ms Garland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Brimsham Green School

Following my visit to your school on 17 December 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen the governing body and increase the level of challenge directed at leaders
- raise the achievement of lower ability pupils and disadvantaged, middle-ability boys.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with senior leaders, the governing body and the school improvement partner to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. Various documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, external notes of visit and minutes of governing body meetings. Documents pertaining to the management of teachers' performance and

communication with parents and carers were also considered. The lead inspector jointly observed pupils' learning with a senior leader.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there has been a high turnover of staff. In part, this is because leaders have raised expectations of staff. At the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year, there were various leadership appointments, including two assistant headteachers and the head of English. Staffing has stabilised recently, in part because of these changes. There have also been changes to the governing body, as new governors have joined. The current chair of governors has been in post since September 2018.

Main findings

Senior leaders have been proactive and diligent in their efforts to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. They understand that their efforts must be focused relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching. To this end, leaders have introduced various strategies that are having a positive impact and raising pupils' achievement. Leaders are honest, open and objective in their appraisal of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, they know the school well and use this understanding to inform effective strategic decision making.

Leaders have set higher expectations for staff and pupils since the previous inspection. Middle leaders are now more effective in their roles, taking greater responsibility for the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils in their subject areas. This is because they, and other leaders and staff, are engaging with bespoke training and professional development, which is helping to improve skills. It is also because senior leaders have implemented more robust procedures to monitor the performance of staff. These greater demands have led to some staff leaving the school. Those staff remaining, however, are rising to the challenge and the quality of teaching is improving as a result. Staff are positive about the direction the school is taking; leaders comment on their enthusiasm and dedication.

Leaders are well supported by governors, who are committed and loyal champions of the school. Governors know the school well and are able to discuss the performance of specific groups of pupils. Although the chair is relatively new in post, he is conscious of the need for leaders to evaluate their work and judge the impact of their actions. Governors appreciate that good intentions are not enough; leaders' work must result in improved outcomes for pupils. To this end, they are developing their skills in providing suitable challenge that holds leaders to account. Leaders are actively encouraging this. However, there is further work to do in this regard as new governors settle into their roles.

Aspects of teaching across the school have improved since the previous inspection. Teachers are now routinely planning work that is matched to the needs of pupils of

different abilities. The most able pupils are challenged through extension activities that deepen their thinking, including for students in the sixth form. In Year 11 mathematics, for example, the most able pupils follow a further mathematics qualification alongside their GCSE work. Lower ability pupils are provided with resources and modified tasks that enable them to better access their learning. For example, in Year 8 English, lower ability pupils are provided with writing frames that provide paragraph-opening sentences to help pupils produce pieces of extended writing.

Teachers across the curriculum, in accordance with the school's policy, are now providing feedback consistently to pupils about how they can improve their work. In different subjects, pupils are provided with practical, meaningful advice that leads them to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their work. They are encouraged to edit and re-draft work accordingly, to apply their understanding.

Teachers are now using the information they have about pupils' needs and their ongoing progress to inform and adapt their teaching to better effect. Staff are familiar with pupils' prior attainment and their backgrounds. They use this information to prepare resources, manage classrooms, deploy staff and plan activities. Effective knowledge of their pupils is also helping teachers to ask deeper, more enquiry-led questions during discussions. Effective questioning is engaging pupils in their learning, which, in turn, is reflected in their written work.

Teaching assistants are now being deployed differently and having a more positive impact on pupils' achievement as a result. Their new ways of working are enabling support staff to build up better relationships with pupils and teachers within subject areas. They are also developing more specialist knowledge of specific subjects, according to the subject area in which they are based. This is helping teaching assistants to provide more bespoke, effective support to pupils.

The progress of different groups of pupils is increasing as a result of these improvements to the quality of teaching. The most able pupils are now making better progress than they were at the time of the previous inspection. Post-16 outcomes have also improved and are in line with the national average. However, leaders and governors acknowledge, correctly, that the achievement of lower ability pupils and the small number of middle-ability disadvantaged boys is lagging behind the achievement of their peers. Leaders have now introduced measures to remedy this underperformance.

Leaders have improved communication with parents since the previous inspection. They were quick to respond to this area for improvement. Parents are now consulted more frequently about leaders' decision making and are more involved in the school's work. Parents' forums provide leaders with feedback about different aspects of their work, which leaders act on. For example, leaders replaced the termly newsletter with a fortnightly briefing because parents considered the newsletter too unwieldy.

Pupils behave in a calm and orderly way as they move around the school site. They are well behaved in their lessons. In part, this is because they share positive relationships with their teachers and because of the warm, inclusive 'feel' of the school, which encourages pupils to strive for success.

External support

The school improvement adviser provides effective support to the school. Her close involvement over time has enabled her to provide guidance and expertise in relation to different areas of the school's work. She has worked with leaders and governors to grasp fully the importance of evaluating the impact of their work on pupils' achievement and outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector