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Mr Will Thompson
The Brittons Academy
Ford Lane
Rainham
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Dear Mr Thompson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Brittons Academy

Following the visit of myself and Jane Moon, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 11 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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection in May 2017.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust, 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:

- ensure that all teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve
- increase the level of challenge for the most able
- develop pupils' literacy skills through extended writing
- ensure that the interim governing body increases the amount of challenge provided to school leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself, the chair of the interim governing board, the chair of the trust, the chief executive officer of the trust, and other senior and middle leaders from the school and trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Inspectors met with groups of pupils and spoke informally with pupils during lessons and social time. We scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's most recent self-evaluation, its improvement plans, external reviews and information regarding pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. Inspectors made 13 short visits to lessons, accompanied by yourself or another member of the school leadership team.

Context

Since the previous inspection in May 2017, a new interim governing board was set up in January 2018 and you were appointed as headteacher from September 2018. The trust has carried out a major restructuring of the school staff and 20 staff left at the end of the academic year 2018. New leaders in mathematics, geography and drama have been appointed from September 2018. You have abolished the house system and moved to a year system.

Main findings

Since your appointment as headteacher, you have wasted no time in addressing the key issues identified at the last inspection. You have brought staff together; morale is high and staff are fully behind your vision of securing a good or better school. Pupils enjoy school and behaviour is good. You have accurately evaluated the areas which need attention and put a robust, manageable plan in place to secure improvement for all pupils.

You are acutely aware that, overall, the GCSE results in both 2017 and 2018 were not good enough. Published validated performance information is not yet available for 2018. While this data is likely to show improvements in some areas, there is a long way to go to ensure that all groups of pupils, across every subject, achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.

You are taking effective action to ensure that the day-to-day teaching that all pupils receive is at least good. You have enabled many opportunities for staff to routinely engage in professional development, which is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning.

Our visits to classrooms showed that teachers were enthusiastic and demonstrated sound subject knowledge. Well-structured activities and effective questioning deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. However, some activities set do not always sufficiently challenge pupils, particularly the most able. Teachers need to have higher aspirations of what all pupils can achieve. Work looked at showed that

pupils respond to feedback from teachers and have regular opportunities to improve their work and address any misconceptions. Opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills, through extended writing, are limited.

Middle leaders feel supported and empowered to take responsibility for their areas of work. They speak positively about the impact of working with leaders within school and across the trust. They value the personal training opportunities they are given to develop their skills, for example on nationally recognised courses such as the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NPQML). In areas which require more specific support, such as English and modern foreign languages, you and staff from the trust are more directly involved in driving forward change.

You have ensured that pupils studying music and drama at key stage 3 have increased curriculum time. Also, that there are more extra-curricular activities in the creative arts. As a result, pupils are better prepared to successfully study these subjects at GCSE. To support the most able, triple science has been reintroduced at GCSE and the take-up is very high. A curriculum review is currently being undertaken to ensure that all pupils can achieve positive outcomes and are well prepared for the next stage in their education or employment.

You identified that assessment data was not accurate, and staff were overgenerous in the predictions they gave about pupils' achievements. You are much more confident that teachers' assessments are more accurate, because external moderation has taken place in core subject areas, and more is planned. This, together with teachers deepening their understanding of GCSE grades, through better use of material provided by the examination boards, is enabling more accurate assessments. This is putting leaders in a stronger position to check on the amount of progress pupils are making against their targets and drives sharper intervention strategies for pupils who fall behind.

Following a review of governance in November 2017, the trust put in place an interim governing board in January 2018. The interim governing board is working hard to improve its own effectiveness. Governors have a range of useful skills and are clear about the delegation of duties. They have regular training opportunities which are linked to different areas of the school and are committed to improving the outcomes for young people. As a result, governance is getting stronger. Documents show that governors are beginning to challenge leaders more effectively, but this still needs to be improved further.

Strategies to improve attendance are proving to be effective. The introduction of the year leaders and supporting 'the whole family' approach has led to tighter systems in place to monitor attendance and follow up poor attendance. Attendance is currently above the national average and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is rapidly reducing and below the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved significantly and is only slightly below national averages.

Since the section 5 inspection, a review of pupil premium has taken place. This has helped improve school practice and identified additional strategies to support disadvantaged pupils. In a few areas the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are better than for non-disadvantaged pupils. In most areas the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are too low. However, this reflects the picture that outcomes for all pupils are not good enough. In classes visited by inspectors there was no difference in the quality of work produced by disadvantaged pupils against non-disadvantaged pupils.

External support

Support has been given through the Empower Learning Academy Trust. Last academic year the science department received specialist adviser support for one day a week and this was effective in helping to improve outcomes in triple science, particularly for the most able. Additional help includes working with other schools in the trust to moderate pupils' work to ensure accurate teacher assessments. The trust recognises that it must provide the school with additional support to accelerate the progress required for the school to become good. This is particularly required in English and modern foreign languages. As a result, the school is receiving increased specialist support and a member of the trust will join the senior leadership team of the school next term.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Havering. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector