

21 February 2019

Mrs Emma Ravenscroft
Head of School
Grestone Academy
Grestone Avenue
Handsworth Wood
Birmingham
West Midlands
B20 1ND

Dear Mrs Ravenscroft

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grestone Academy

Following my visit to your school on 6 February 2019, 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in November 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 teaching is consistently good across the school by ensuring that staff have high expectations and aspirations for all pupils
- embed the attendance initiatives already started to further improve the attendance of all pupils
- plan opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills across all areas of the curriculum to ensure that all pupils make strong progress
- Carry out the external review of governance that was a recommendation from the previous inspection report.

Evidence

During the inspection, I had a telephone conversation with the chair of the trust, and meetings were held with you, your chief executive officers, your senior leadership team, the chair of the governing body and parents and carers to discuss actions taken since your previous inspection. The school's self-evaluation document, school development plan and subject action plans were evaluated, and I conducted a learning walk around school with you. Together, we examined pupils' books, spoke to children about their work and their learning and explored the school's current assessment information with your senior leaders.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant staff changes, including the appointment of yourself as the head of school. A new deputy headteacher, a number of new assistant headteachers, a new chair of governors and three newly qualified teachers have also been appointed.

Main findings

Since the establishment of your highly effective leadership team, the pace of improvement and expectations has quickened. However, you and your leadership team know that standards need to improve further, and you realise that change needs to take place more rapidly to ensure that standards rise. Due to your drive, passion and tenacity, you have already implemented a number of improvements, and this is evidenced in books and through your internal tracking system. You have high aspirations for all pupils and staff in your school, and your relentless drive and rigour are beginning to permeate the school community.

You have updated the school's improvement plans and these are clearly focused on areas identified from your previous inspection, 2018 end-of-year data and the school's current data. These plans include challenging targets and clear timescales, and they detail who is accountable for which area of improvement. The chair of governors and the chief executives are using these plans to hold you and your leaders to account.

You have established clear expectations and non-negotiables in relation to classroom practice, work in books, learning environments and aspirational targets. Although the impact of these is starting to be evident in some areas, teaching is still not consistently good across the school. Where the quality or quantity of work is not good enough, you are using your highly experienced leadership team to ensure that teachers are supported and challenged to be able to meet the required expectations.

The school has also been involved in several initiatives, which have given teachers the skills and subject knowledge needed to improve their teaching and strengthen progress. As a result of this training, improvement is evident in the quality of teaching and learning. However, there is still more to do.

As a school, you have developed an accurate and reliable assessment system to ensure that all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and or/disabilities (SEND), make strong progress. You and your leadership team are using this information to ensure that teachers are identifying pupils' next steps in their learning and are able to detect any gaps in their knowledge and understanding. This robust system is starting to have an impact on pupils' progress. Your skilled leadership team has also used the recommendations from the external pupil premium report and has created clear plans where the actions and impact can be evaluated. Improvements in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are evident across school. These pupils are now making at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Due to the consistent application of what has been learned in staff training, reasoning, problem-solving and opportunities for pupils to think deeply are evident in mathematics. However, these skills are not being applied across the curriculum. You are, therefore, revising the curriculum to ensure that it is broad and balanced as you believe that this, together with consistently good teaching, will be the driver for pupils to make stronger progress.

You and your deputy have been focusing on attendance, as you realise that this is an area that still needs further improvement. You have introduced a number of incentives and have been working closely with parents to help them understand that 'every day matters'. By raising the profile of attendance, figures are starting to improve. However, this is still an area that needs further work in order to help raise pupils' outcomes and equip them for life.

Parental engagement was identified as an area that needed improvement at the time of the previous inspection. You and your leadership team have addressed this issue, resulting in an increased number of parents being involved in school life and attending parent workshops. The parents spoken to during this inspection commented on how well their children had settled into school and how much progress they were making. Furthermore, an active and engaged parent teacher association has been set up, and parent volunteers come into school regularly to provide additional support.

External support

Since your section 5 inspection, you and your leadership team have been working with a variety of external agencies, including the Birmingham Education Partnership. A pupil premium review has taken place. A review of governance is required. This was a recommendation from your previous inspection and has not happened yet.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Brunt
Ofsted Inspector