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19 October 2007

Mrs Christine Jones
The Headteacher
Buckingham School
London Road
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Dear Mrs Jones

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 October 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would be grateful if you would pass my thanks on to the school councillors who took the time to speak to me and who were impressive in their commitment to securing improvements for their school.

Since the school was last inspected in January, unvalidated results of the summer's assessments have become available. These show improvements at Key Stage 3 in mathematics, English and science. At this level the school is performing broadly in line with schools nationally. However at Key Stage 4 the attainment of pupils dropped very significantly in 2007. Performance at this level is well below the national average. As pupils enter the school with standards broadly in line with the national average this indicates significant underperformance. There remains a significant gap between the relatively better achievements of girls than that of boys.

As a result of the inspection in January 2007, the school was asked to:

- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning to that of the best to raise achievement.
- Use data and tracking processes better to raise teachers' expectations, especially of boys and more able students, so that all students achieve as well as they can.
- Ensure that improvement strategies are fully and effectively implemented across the whole school, through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of their impact.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievements.

With regard to improving the quality of teaching and learning the school reports that it has worked with individuals. My visits to a sample of classrooms, however, indicated that there is too much satisfactory and inadequate teaching and too little that is good. Lessons were characterised by low expectations and slow pace. Pupils were generally passive. Although during the inspector's visit no poor behaviour was seen school councillors felt that in some lessons the poor behaviour of a minority of students impedes their learning. There was evidence that teachers are sharing learning goals with their classes; however few reviewed progress against these during the lesson or, when they mark work, give clear feedback on the next steps that pupils need to take in order to improve. Whilst in some lessons the quality of questioning of pupils was extremely good, in general teachers were not using their knowledge of pupils' prior learning or skills in order to plan appropriate learning activities for them.

The school has developed systems to track student progress. The systems tracking academic progress are complex. The school is rightly concerned that the assessment data that is fed into the system is inaccurate. This led the school to anticipate a 7% rise in the proportion of pupils gaining 5 higher grade GCSEs rather than the 10% fall that they actually experienced. Teachers are not using the data to enable them to match their teaching to learners' needs and expectations remain too low. The school has not managed to improve the rate of progress made by boys or by more able students at Key Stage 4. Most pupils know their targets, but school councillors reflected that they did not feel supported to achieve well, particularly in gaining higher grades. The school has also set up systems to track behaviour, but are not analysing the data sufficiently in order to inform strategies for improvement.

Senior leaders require information from departments about the impact of actions they are taking in order meet school targets. However they are insufficiently active in working with middle managers to model how improvements might be achieved and it is not clear that the data that they generate is used to refine approaches to improvement. There is too little whole school working on particular issues such as teaching and learning, behaviour management or intervention strategies in order to secure the necessary rapid improvement. Departmental self evaluations indicate that across the school there is some acute analysis and planning for improvement but the evidence suggests that judgements, like those of senior leaders, are over generous. The quality of analysis is very variable; some departments do not recognise their responsibilities and blame students and external factors for poor results.

The support provided by the local authority has been insufficient to ensure that the school is making satisfactory progress towards offering an adequate education for its pupils. In part this is a result of the restructuring of posts within the authority but also reflects a failure to monitor closely the work of the school, evaluate progress and support senior and middle leaders appropriately.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emma Ing". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "E".

Emma Ing
Her Majesty's Inspector