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28 June 2013

Mr David Ramsden
Headteacher
Little Heath School
Little Heath Road
Reading
RG31 5TY

Dear Mr Ramsden

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Little Heath School

Following my visit to your school on 26 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 September 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, and the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Governing Body. The inspector conducted four joint lesson observations with a member of the school's leadership team. The school action plan was evaluated and the inspector looked at summary statements of progress and other documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work.

Context

A number of changes have occurred since the last monitoring inspection. 40 members of staff have left the school, which equates to around a third of the teaching staff. However, some of these teachers are on maternity leave and will return to the school at a later date. Twelve newly qualified teachers have been appointed and will take up their posts in September 2013. New leaders have been appointed for sciences, history, Key Stage 3 mathematics, Key Stage 4 geography

and a head of Year 7. A new post of 'raising standards leader' has been initiated. Starting in September 2013, the school will be changing to a two-year Key Stage 3 for students in Years 7 and 8 and a three-year Key Stage 4. Consequently, students will begin their GCSE courses in Year 9, taking three years to complete the course.

Main findings

The headteacher, governors and other senior leaders have continued with their drive for improvement. They have taken decisive and effective further action since the last monitoring inspection. As a result, positive and fundamental changes have happened rapidly. The school is showing significant improvements, especially in students' achievements, the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the governing body. The drive for improvement is apparent across all aspects of the school, and has not been confined to just those areas identified for improvement at the last school inspection.

Students' achievement has been raised, particularly in English and mathematics, because there is more typically good and better teaching. Work seen in lessons, students' books and the school's own data show that standards are improving quickly and all students are making faster progress than in previous years, including those eligible for the additional pupil premium funding or those receiving additional support. Since the last monitoring inspection, the initiative for each department to have a literacy champion has become more consistently embedded. As a result, every department includes literacy in their subject schemes of work and teachers are providing students with a greater range of opportunities to use and develop their reading, writing, speaking and communication skills in all subjects. The role of the raising standards leader (RSL) has been significant in raising expectations of students' capabilities, in holding staff to account for the progress students make in their subjects and classes and in ensuring that the pupil premium funds are having a positive impact on student learning.

The quality of teaching has improved as a result of whole-school training and a programme of coaching. Staff have worked collaboratively to agree a set of non-negotiables for classrooms, based on 'great teaching at Little Heath'. These are being implemented consistently across the school and have helped to increase the proportion of good and better teaching. In the best lessons, learning is brisk because teachers are more adept at using assessment information to ensure work is pitched at the right level. Consequently, students with different abilities are challenged to achieve their best, including extension and challenge for the most able. More opportunities are also provided for students to work independently. In some of the lessons we observed teaching did not exploit all the opportunities for students to be engaged in productive learning all of the time. The use of assessment, including student targets, has been strengthened further. Students know their targets and their next steps of improvement and are increasingly using these to improve their own work.

Senior leaders have a thorough knowledge of the school's work because of comprehensive monitoring and development programmes. The leadership of teaching and learning has improved further. Leaders have effectively increased the rigor with which staff are held to account for student outcomes, including through monitoring and the revised department profiles which focuses on the quality of teaching. Heads of departments have more opportunities to observe lessons, with senior leaders or independently, to help them monitor, evaluate and improve their subjects further. However, department profiles are not always focused tightly enough on the impact of teaching on learning and senior leaders do not exploit opportunities for coaching other staff during lesson observations to develop their evaluative skills further.

The new Chair and joint Vice-Chairs have brought about significant improvements to the functions and roles of the governing body, particularly in the direct monitoring of the school's work and increasing their presence around the school. Governors have completed a number of training activities to increase their skills and knowledge of their roles and responsibilities. Individual governors are quickly developing an area of specialist knowledge to enable more robust challenge and support of senior leaders and subsequent training of other governors. For example, one governor leads the interrogation and use of assessment information to monitor student achievement. Governors have completed and analysed surveys with staff, students and their parents to gauge their views about the school and to inform the school action plan.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. During this visit we agreed that the school should:

- increase the focus on the impact of teaching on learning in the department profiles
- exploit opportunities for coaching with other staff during lesson observations to help develop their evaluative skills further
- ensure that all lessons exploit the opportunities for students to be engaged in learning activities all of the time
- monitor the impact of short-term intervention programmes for the different groups of pupils and transfer successful teaching strategies into every day teaching
- send copies of the governors' survey results and action plan to HMI
- send end-of-year assessment information to HMI by the end of July 2013
- invite HMI to the meeting in September between senior leaders and governors on pupil progress and the interrogation of summer 2013 results.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support for improving behaviour and attendance for greater student engagement in learning. The school improvement partner has completed a series of joint lesson observations and scrutiny of assessment information to monitor the school's developments. External consultants have continued to provide training activities linked to the school's action plan.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2012

- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching by:
 - enabling all teachers to use assessment information to plan learning that meets the needs of all students and stretches the more able students
 - using robust scrutiny of lesson observation findings to extend and evaluate the professional development programme, so that teaching staff, all leaders and the governing body better analyse the progress of students in lessons and over time.
- Raise significantly the percentage of students making expected, and better than expected, progress in mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Close the remaining gaps in achievement of students eligible for pupil premium, students who are supported through school action plus and between boys and girls in mathematics.
- Improve reading, writing, speaking and communication skills across the curriculum through a more comprehensive and shared approach to the teaching of literacy.
- Develop further the capacity of the governing body to hold leaders to account for students' achievement and to evaluate the impact of the monitoring of teaching and performance management. An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.