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7 March 2013

Pauline Dichler
Headteacher
Stony Dean School
Orchard End Avenue
Amersham
HP7 9JW

Dear Mrs Dichler

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Stony Dean School

Following my visit to your school on 6 March 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit I met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I toured the school and visited classrooms. I looked at a number of documents and evaluated the school's plan for improvement.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school's staffing or student group since the inspection in November. Major building works are underway and until they are completed the students and staff are working in relatively cramped conditions.

Main findings

The outcome of the inspection in November was a surprise and a disappointment to the school staff and the governing body. However, there is now a determination to deal with the issues that the inspection highlighted. The school's plan of action includes all of the detail of the areas for improvement and states clearly what will be done and when. The plan is a working document and has recently been adapted in response to reviews of the steps that have already been taken. The local authority has drawn up its own plan which dovetails with the school's plan, and the governing body has also put together a plan to show how its members will enhance their skills in interpreting data and evaluating the school's progress.

The school's plan contains measurable targets for the proportions of good or better teaching. Leaders understand that the quality of teaching is judged not only on the basis of what happens in lessons but on the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress over time. The plan however does not include any measurable targets for students' progress over the year and so does not make explicit what impact improvements in teaching would have on students' progress.

The school has a wealth of data about individual students' attainment and progress. What is missing, however, is an overall summary of the main messages. Students' progress from their baseline assessments also needs to be evaluated in comparison with the national transition matrices and progression guidance, as this is one of the measures that is used by inspectors.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- strengthen the plan for improvement by including targets for students' progress, that link to the expected improvements in teaching
- include a target for the proportion of outstanding teaching
- use national transition matrices and progression guidance materials alongside baseline assessments of current students' attainment to determine whether or not all are on track to make expected or better progress.

I will refer to Ofsted's lead HMI for special educational needs to seek to identify a similar type of school recently judged good or outstanding that would be willing to share information about how students' progress is analysed. I will visit the Stony Dean again in the first half of the autumn term to discuss assessment information and to undertake some observations of lessons alongside senior leaders. Ofsted's report *Getting to Good – twelve outstanding special schools* can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090171.

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

External support

The local authority is providing the school and the governing body with appropriately targeted support and advice that is helping it to move forward. It is also keeping an eye on how the school is making progress in dealing with the areas for improvement. The support is appreciated by the staff, who are receptive to advice and guidance. The local authority understands the need for support to be gradually reduced so that the school can demonstrate fully its capacity to drive improvement from within.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector