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Gillian Laird
Stephenson Studio School
Thornborough Road
LE67 3TN

Dear Mrs Laird

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stephenson Studio School

Following my visit to your school on 18 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that targets set for students in both the main school and the sixth form are sufficiently challenging to bring about good or better progress for all students, especially the most able.
- Take advantage of all external support, such as the one offered by an outstanding school, to support the quality of teaching and leadership and evaluate it carefully to ensure effective practice is embedded across the school
- Further refine your marking and feedback policy so that students can effectively act upon areas for improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the Chair of Trustees and the school improvement partner to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the head of sixth form and one of the school's personal coaches, to discuss how their practice has developed recently. I also met with a group of students and carried out a learning walk with you, during which we spoke to students about their learning and progress. I also viewed students' workbooks during my meeting with them. The school's improvement plans were evaluated and the latest unvalidated 2013 results were scrutinised.

Context

There have been significant changes since the last school's inspection. 6 teachers have left as well as 2 personal coaches (non-teaching staff). In addition, the deputy headteacher, head of sixth form and the SENCO are all new to their management posts.

Main findings

Since the last inspection leaders have taken significant action to address the most urgent areas for improvement as set out in the report. Improvement plans rightly focus on improving the quality of teaching; a comprehensive CPD programme and quality assurance calendar is now in place. The plans also identify how new systems and policies will be monitored and quality assured. Teachers have already received training to improve their questioning skills in the classroom. All teachers are clear about their roles and responsibilities and use data about students to plan for their progress in lessons, although current targets set are not always challenging for the most able. A whole school marking and feedback policy called C.A.R. (Comment, Action, Response) has been introduced and this has been well received by students, who recognise how it may support them to make better progress. The Chair of Trustees is experienced and holds the headteacher to account effectively. He has supported leaders in developing more partners to improve their practice. A new recruit to the governing body, an experienced headteacher, will add further challenge and support for leaders. The headteacher has been diligent and effective. She is well supported by stakeholders including staff, students and parents. Her clear vision has brought about a renewed zeal amongst staff to bring about rapid changes.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

In addition to the board of trustees, the headteacher also benefits from good support from a school improvement partner, who is an experienced ex-headteacher. He has successfully brokered a link with an outstanding school in a neighbouring local authority. This provides an exciting opportunity for leaders to learn from

outstanding practitioners and build capacity for further improvements. The head of the modern foreign languages and English departments have also received support from subject advisers, who were recommended by the school improvement partner. Both middle leaders have reported that they have found this support invaluable.

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

Yours sincerely

ZConnolly

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector