

Serco Inspections  
Colmore Plaza  
20 Colmore Circus Queensway  
Birmingham  
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T: 0121 6799163  
Direct email: lewis.mackie1@serco.com



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David Bailey  
Headteacher  
Biddenham Upper School and Sports College  
Biddenham Turn  
MK40 4AZ

Dear Mr Bailey

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Biddenham Upper School and Sports College**

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 2014, 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 September 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 last section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure all teachers provide support and encouragement to students to improve the quality of their written work, especially in activities requiring extended written tasks.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, students, representatives of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated and discussed the school's improvement plan. I made short visits to four lessons and looked at the school's records of the monitoring of teaching.

## **Main findings**

The improvements that were starting to be evident at the time of the inspection are continuing. Standards rose in GCSE examinations in 2013 and the school's data show that they continue to rise. Students are making better progress in all year groups. Writing is still a weaker aspect of students' work, especially when working on extended written tasks.

In order to improve the progress made by the most able students, additional challenges are in place. Students receive regular personal mentoring to ensure they understand their target grades and feel consulted about how they are devised. In mathematics, students can start to tackle AS level work as soon as they have achieved their target at GCSE. They appreciate challenges in other subjects such as history and German. Sixth form students receive emails alerting them to additional optional challenges. In physical education (PE) lessons, students receive an innovative 'fast-food' homework list, so they can choose the level they want to work at and are tempted by the A\*/A menu.

The school monitors teaching regularly. Students confirmed that they find the majority of lessons interesting and engaging. Leaders use a range of evidence, including students' views and evidence of the impact teaching has on learning, in order to judge the quality. The information feeds into a clear cycle of review, personalised and well-received training and then the modification of the development plans. Leaders identify aspects of good practice and ensure others benefit. For example, PE teachers have observed best practice in teaching sixth form students in order to improve their practice in this phase. Mentoring for science teachers has resulted in students making better progress.

Governors have undertaken training on a range of issues that relate to their work and are very clear about what needs to happen, if the school is to meet its targets for the year and beyond. The committee structure has been refined. Governors undertake a range of activities in order to gather evidence that things are improving. This includes discussions with staff and students. They know how to interpret data that the school produces about how well students are achieving. They challenge the school well in order to ensure the pattern of improvement continues.

Your leadership is highly valued in the school and you have created a strong sense of common purpose and a determination to improve. Staff appreciate your willingness to share in the teaching across a range of groups and subjects. Subject leaders feel fully involved in discussions relating to the development of the curriculum. You have improved the action plans in the light of the inspection and are in the process of refining the development plans for individual subjects to increase their effectiveness. For example, some are still too vague about what impact is expected from the actions to be taken. However, the process that links planning, actions and subsequent review is systematic, regular and understood by leaders across the school.

## **External support**

The local authority acted swiftly to challenge the school rigorously when standards fell in 2012. This challenge and support continues. Governors have benefited from training and from a range of services that the local authority provides. The school received useful support in preparing for inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**