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14 July 2014

Mr Oliver Knight
The Greenwich Free School
403 Shooters Hill Road
London
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Dear Mr Knight

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Greenwich Free School

Following my visit to your school on Monday 14 July, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 February 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

The headteacher and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas relating to leadership that were identified at the section 5 inspection.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas relating to teaching that were identified at the section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a group of middle leaders to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Accompanied at various times by you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher, I made short visits to seven lessons. I held a short telephone conversation with an external adviser who has recently completed a review of the school.

Context

You took up your post on 1 June 2014. Between the section 5 inspection and your appointment, the school continued to be led by the deputy headteacher and the resource manager.

Main findings

My visit left me in no doubt whatsoever that you have taken very swift action during your first six weeks in post. You have carried out a thorough evaluation of your school; you have commissioned two independent whole-school reviews and a number of subject reviews; and you have used these to help you form the view that not only was the inspection judgement accurate, but also that key aspects of provision have not improved sufficiently in the past six months. You have considered the performance of every staff member and correctly concluded that teaching overall requires improvement. You have produced a sharply focussed action plan that has clear actions, deadlines, and lines of responsibility. Members of the governing body have listened to your analysis, accepted your findings, and have given you their full support. They have accepted that the school's performance has not been good enough and they expect significant improvements.

All this provides convincing evidence that the inspection areas for improvement relating to leadership are being addressed effectively. However, considerably more needs to be done before leadership and management overall can be judged good or better. New assessment and data systems have yet to take effect. You recognise that you have played a disproportionate role in recent management initiatives. While understanding the need for a new headteacher to make his mark, as the school expands other members of the senior team must play a more strategic part in the school's leadership than they do at present.

External reviews have correctly indicated insufficient progress since the section 5 inspection against the areas for improvement in teaching. While you and the governing body have accepted this, current practice suggests that your understanding is not shared by all teaching staff. Too much teaching is still characterised by the issues identified by inspectors as reasons for students not making enough progress. These include limited support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's assessment information suggests that, in almost every area of the curriculum, these students make less progress than their peers. Marking remains variable, and assessment does not place enough emphasis on measuring students against age-related expectations for subject knowledge and skills. Presentation in books and files is still not good enough; the dominance of the worksheets continues to restrict opportunities for students to write extended answers. In some cases, these worksheets are photocopies of handwritten documents that are not well presented and do not therefore model good practice. I did not see evidence of textbooks being used in any of the seven lessons that I visited, even though all were in academic subjects. While middle leaders

demonstrate sound subject knowledge and great enthusiasm in their own teaching, the way that different areas of the curriculum are managed requires improvement. At present, the leadership of some subjects is centred more around individual staff teaching styles and philosophy, than on corporate expectations and structures.

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

A review of governance has been undertaken with the outcomes due to be reported shortly. External reviews have been also been published, with more planned for the coming academic year. Partnerships have been formed with an outstanding academy and another Free School in London, to develop self-evaluation and peer-review. I am of the opinion that teaching and subject leadership would benefit from closer partnership working with outstanding practitioners in other schools to improve the day-to-day quality of provision, as well as evaluating it.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector