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Mrs Mary Morrison
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Morrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bower Park

Following my visit to the school on 13 April 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are still not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and members of the governing body. I also held a discussion with a senior officer from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection, and I met with the headteacher of Hall Mead School. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the academy's improvement plans, information about pupils' achievement, documentation relating to safeguarding and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since my last visit, there has been a high turnover of staffing, including school leaders. New heads of science, information technology, and physical education have been appointed recently, as well as assistant headteachers for English, science and mathematics. The new assistant headteacher for mathematics is also the lead for the pupil premium funding. The governing body is consulting all key stakeholders on

joining a multi-academy trust with two other schools. The lead school, Hall Mead, is an outstanding teaching academy. Informal meetings have already taken place, as have some training activities. This arrangement will be formalised in September 2016 as part of the Empower Learning academy trust.

Main findings

The recommendations from my last monitoring inspection have not been addressed with sufficient impact. Weak teaching remains the barrier to pupils learning effectively. As a result, too many pupils continue to make slow progress, including in the core subjects. The 2015 GCSE results, published since my last visit, show that the gap between disadvantaged pupils, their peers and all pupils nationally widened markedly in both attainment and progress. The proportion of Year 11 pupils currently on track to achieve national expectations by the end of the academic year is lower than in 2015. The school's figures demonstrate that in February 2016 only 38% of all pupils were on track to achieve at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. This figure decreased to 17% for disadvantaged pupils, compared to 53% of non-disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend the academy is significant, being just under 50% of the whole school population. This represents an alarming number of pupils who are being let down. Within this underachieving group are a small minority of disadvantaged boys from a White British background who consistently make exceptionally slow progress.

The high turnover of staffing, several of which were school leaders, has contributed to the slow progress since the last monitoring inspection. You have taken steps to strengthen the capacity of senior leaders with new appointments. However, it is too soon to see the impact of their work. Furthermore, your own evaluation judges the effectiveness of middle leaders to be limited.

However, you and other senior leaders have implemented a regular monitoring cycle. Teachers' work is checked systematically. Pupils' work books are examined along with regular checks on learning and progress in lessons. Pupil progress meetings, linked to an analysis of pupil progress and attainment, take place so that all staff are aware of those pupils who are underachieving. However, information from these activities is not used by leaders to identify precise actions that are needed to improve teaching and learning.

Presentation remains an issue in several classes that we visited, particularly in mathematics. Despite new equipment, including new exercise books to encourage them to take greater pride in their work, some pupils pay little attention as to how they organise and record their learning. Some teachers still do not challenge pupils when they produce messy work. Your own monitoring acknowledges this weakness, yet inconsistencies remain. Many pupils appreciate the time they are given to practice or extend their learning in response to teachers' feedback. However, other

pupils are not given the same opportunities. The new marking policy does not make sure that all pupils have effective feedback on how to improve their work.

Weak teaching, inconsistencies in behaviour management and low expectations for student behaviour and conduct also impede the learning and progress of pupils, especially in key stage 3. Despite having a clear system for dealing with poor behaviour, low-level disruption continues to go unchallenged and unreported. Several pupils told me that the behaviour of some of their peers disrupts their learning. Other pupils confessed that they misbehave when lessons are 'too hard or boring'. Observations confirm that a significant minority of younger pupils are inattentive in their lessons. They engage in casual discussions about anything other than their work. Some pupils wander around the classroom, and are either allowed to get away with it or ignore the teachers' request to return to their seats. The local authority's observations confirm that pupils' learning behaviour is weak. Their review in January 2016 reported that pupils' behaviour was 'less than good' in mathematics lessons. Conduct at lunchtime is usually respectful and calm when senior leaders are present. However, a small minority of pupils were observed throwing books at one another in the learning resource centre. This behaviour was not challenged by the adult in charge. Pupils told me that this was not a one-off incident but occurs regularly.

The school commissioned an external review of the pupil premium funding in January 2015 in response to the recommendations of my first monitoring visit. This identified poor attendance of disadvantaged students. A target of 5% or less was set in an attempt to reduce persistent absence. The school's most recent figures show no improvement as they estimate that 20% of disadvantaged pupils are persistently absent. The new assistant headteacher, who leads on the achievement and personal development of these pupils, recognises that the tracking of interventions, impact and evaluation needs to be improved. Furthermore, she acknowledges that the heart of the problem is that these pupils are not taught well enough to make the progress they are capable of in lessons.

Governors continue to have an insufficient grasp of the school's underperformance, despite the fact that they have had specific training for this. Leaders have been very open and honest about the significant gaps which have existed and continue to exist between the performance of key groups, especially in key stage 4. Governors have been discussing the possibility of joining a multi-academy trust. This has taken far too long, particularly in light of the limited progress that has been made since the last full inspection. This situation should be resolved as quickly as possible.

External support

The academy has re-engaged with the local authority, which is supportive of the actions that leaders are taking. However, it is also the local authority's view that progress has been too slow since the previous monitoring visit. The academy has

begun to develop a partnership with a local outstanding teaching school. New leaders and members of staff are already benefiting from a range of training and support from this school. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this work on students' attainment or progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of children's services for Havering and the regional schools commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Hinds
Her Majesty's Inspector