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27 June 2014

Karin Rowsell
Headteacher
Wapping High School
153 Commercial Road
London
E1 2DA

Dear Mrs Rowsell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wapping High School

Following my visit to your school on 27 June 2014, 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 March 2014. 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:

- sharpen the school action plan by including more detailed achievement targets for all student groups
- ensure all leaders and governors can evaluate quantifiable information and patterns and trends in attendance, exclusions and achievement data about student groups
- devise a strategic action plan for one and three years to set out the course for the school improvement and the plans and vision for the curriculum
- develop strategic work with local partners to secure further, rapid improvement in teaching and governance.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your senior leaders, two of your middle leaders and two members of your governing body, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your school action plan and reviewed documents about students' achievement, your monitoring of teaching and students' work. I scrutinised minutes of meetings of the governing body, data about attendance and your records about behaviour. We visited lessons together to look at work and watch teaching.

Context

Three teachers are leaving at the end this term. For September 2014, you have appointed new directors of science and English and a new head of mathematics.

Main findings

You, your senior leaders and governors are acutely aware of the urgency needed to secure consistently good teaching and close gaps in students' achievement. Since you attended the Ofsted 'Getting to Good' seminar, you have begun to review the school action plan and you have made sure that all of the areas for improvement from your recent inspection are included. There are clear roles and responsibilities, actions and success criteria. You have included a useful 'status update' column which so far is used well to track the impact of your work.

The action plan includes targets for nationally expected progress in English, mathematics and science for Year 7 and Year 8 but this is not broken down into targets for student groups such as boys, girls, students with special educational needs and those who benefit from the pupil premium funding. The plan describes how teachers are expected to stretch the most able students through better planning and teaching. The success criteria to test this are not always quantifiable targets for these students. We agreed that the plan should include more detail about targets for student groups and expectations for four levels of progress to stretch students to the higher grades of A* and A at GCSE level.

You and your two senior leaders have a clear understanding of the current achievement data for your students. You recognise that not all middle leaders, support staff and teachers are up to speed with using students' progress data to plan high quality teaching and ensure that all lessons stretch the most able and support the less able students. Despite this, teaching is improving and your exemplar marking pack for the new marking policy is used well by some teachers.

There was some good work to develop literacy and some marking pays good attention to developing grammar, spelling and punctuation. Not all students are using the comments from marking to improve their work. Students' mathematical

literacy and their ability to write about their understanding and use of mathematical concepts are variable.

There is some good progress emerging in your recent spring and summer term data but for students in Year 8, their progress in mathematics is still below expectation. You are tackling this through additional external support and training sessions for teachers. The integration of your literacy and numeracy policy across all subjects is at an early stage. You are about to create a clear curriculum map to plan for progression in subjects and links across subjects, with a view to the new curriculum pathways for Key Stage 4.

There remain some issues with students' inattention and students being distracted when teaching is weak. We saw this in two lessons where the work was too easy for some students and for others too difficult. Teaching that requires improvement does not sustain good challenge, appropriate pace and sharp questioning to test students' knowledge and understanding. Good teaching is successfully checking students' understanding in lessons and over a sequence of lessons and there are many opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learnt previously and how to use this knowledge. In lessons, we saw some good questioning to test students thinking and students being asked to evaluate their ideas. This was working well in English and French classes.

Attendance is steadily improving. However, there is variability in the attendance of particular groups including White British students and those eligible for free school meals.

Governors are passionate about improving their effectiveness and are very keen to develop quickly the knowledge and skills for high quality governance. Governors have increased their level of challenge since the recent inspection and are holding senior leaders to account well for school improvement and the targets in the action plan. Governors are checking students' progress carefully. They are asking the right questions about how well gaps are narrowing for achievement but there is little critical review of data about the attendance and behaviour of different student groups. Governors are seeking evidence about how well the pupil premium funding is used and its impact on achievement. This is not linked well enough to the review of attendance data and the performance targets for all staff who provide support to students through this funding. Minutes of meetings tend to record the outcomes from the meetings as opposed to capturing the detail of challenging debate. There was robust discussion about the permanent exclusion and this is documented well in the minutes.

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

During my visit we discussed your ideas for extending your partnership work to help you and your staff tackle weaknesses in teaching and develop more opportunities for strengthening governance. You are working well with an external consultant for mathematics who is helping you revisit the curriculum for next year and support teachers planning and teaching. You are considering how best to develop networks with other free schools, local maintained schools and the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector