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22 May 2013

Mr J Kane
Executive headteacher
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Dear Mr Kane

Special measures monitoring inspection of Walton Hall School

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 28 February and 1 March 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and the acting head of school, a group of teaching and non-teaching staff, the Chair and two members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and two representatives of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plans were evaluated.

Context

The headteacher has been absent due to ill-health since the section 5 inspection. You have extended your previous role with the school, which was as a National

Leader of Education, and are now the executive headteacher. You are spending at least two days a week at the school. A senior leader from the Blackfriars federation of schools has been seconded as acting head of school and is based at Walton Hall full time. An IEB has replaced the governing body.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since taking on your respective roles, you and the acting head of school have taken a range of suitable actions. Very importantly, you have established clear lines of communication with staff. Staff value this and believe that it is already helping them to do their jobs more effectively. They feel that the regular e-mails and texts updating them about what is happening in the school, the morning briefings and the staff meetings are all making them better informed. Staff also say that they can seek advice from both you and the acting head of school whenever they need to. The visible presence of you and the acting head on a day-to-day basis, for example in assemblies, lessons and staff meetings, has communicated to staff that senior leaders are interested in and supportive of their work. These actions have laid important foundations for the next steps that the school needs to take in order to improve.

One result of this improved atmosphere in the school is that staff are starting to respond positively by taking on new subject leadership roles, or resuming roles that they have held in the past. They are keen to help the school to improve as quickly as possible. A barrier to this improvement, however, is the uncertainty about how long the current leadership arrangements will last and staff's perceptions that the plans for change may not be put into practice.

A sound start has been made on establishing a set of assessment data that can be used as a starting point for setting targets in English, mathematics and science for all students. You and the other senior leaders are aware that the targets may need to be revised to become more aspirational as assessment processes become more accurate.

Senior leaders have carried out a set of lesson observations which has highlighted where some positive practice exists in the school. This process has also emphasised some areas where improvement is needed. You are aware of the need to triangulate your judgements by using assessment data and students' work to gain a more detailed picture of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching over time in order to provide support, training and challenge as needed. Staff are beginning to identify their own training needs as they take on more responsibility.

The newly formed IEB is meeting on a fortnightly basis in order to establish quickly what they need to do to support and challenge the school. Your detailed reports to them are informative and helpful. Members of the Board have already divided the action plan among them so that each member can have oversight of an area for improvement. Importantly, they each have a link with a member of the senior leadership team who leads on the area. IEB members are not all familiar with the data used for setting targets for students, and are rightly keen to receive training on this aspect of their work.

The local authority has a range of support that it intends to offer to the school. This has not yet been discussed with senior leaders. The local authority is aware of the importance of ensuring that this support is coherent and aligns closely with the school's action plan.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is not fit for purpose. The actions that the local authority will take to support the school are unclear. The resource allocated to meet different aims is also unclear, and where it is clearly indicated it is sometimes sparse. Some of the timescales, such as the review of staff's continuing professional development needs and a review of subject leadership, lack urgency. Some actions do not have timescales. The plan does not indicate how and when the local authority will monitor and evaluate the school's progress, and the impact of its own actions to secure improvement.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose. It identifies the main actions that need to be taken and the timescales are sensible. It needs improving by making sure that it clearly indicates who will carry out each action, monitor it, and evaluate its effectiveness. Currently, some of these roles are combined.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher as discussed during the monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector