



Department
for Education

Department for Education

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Dev M. Hillman

Please pass on my thanks to Simon and Karen for receiving Rosemary Prince's recent visit to Woodlands School. The purpose of the visit was to hear about recent progress and plans to move the school forward.

The regional office of the Department for Education has four priorities:

- to develop the capacity of multi-academy trusts to support others
- to support and challenge underperforming academies
- to increase the number of free schools
- to encourage greater collaboration to develop a self-improving school led system

A crucial part of the Regional Schools Commissioner role is to hold academy trusts to account for the performance of any schools in their trust. We decided that the best way to understand what is happening in schools was to visit rather than rely just on published data. Our Education Advisers made over 200 visits to academies last year and gained a strong understanding of the individual issues each school faces and the actions being taken to improve outcomes for pupils. Visits are generally for half a day or less and aim not to be a burden on a school.

Where progress or plans for improvements are not sufficient, taking into account Ofsted reports and contextual information, then formal intervention such as pre-warning and warning notices will be considered. Last year after 200 visits to academies just 11 pre-warning notices and warning notices were issued.

Rosemary enjoyed her visit to Woodland, her first since the school moved into its new buildings. She was clearly very impressed with the look and layout of the new school. Equally she was quick to extol the improvement in provision for

the pupils, the energetic and enthusiastic leadership of Simon and the structured and focussed monitoring Karen undertakes on behalf of the trust.

After a relatively short time with the trust's support, Woodlands has started to see some of the headline pupil outcomes rise. Clearly the expected progress levels of 2015 in maths and English have further to travel to reach the standard the school and trust feel are appropriate. This year I understand in the short spring term ten tutor groups in Year 11 have become sixteen, with the tutor delivering focussed English or maths each day at 8.15. Three sets of pre public examinations have been run to prepare pupils and add to intervention information. Expected progress in the '40s' for both maths and English last year is expected to be in the '60s' this summer. The outcome for pupil premium students is expected to move from in the '20s' to the 30th percentile area. At the same time a clear programme of Year 7 intervention work is running to ensure early catch up before a three year Key Stage 4 commences.

Rosemary recounted that she was told 78 staff have moved on since the trust began to work with Woodlands and with 66 joining the school is fully staffed. Half of the new staff are ones Karen has previously worked with and will have been aware of her expectations. Rosemary explained that senior staff at all levels, including a high number of lead practitioners, have very specific responsibilities for developing the quality and consistency of teaching and learning across the school.

Like staff recruitment, pupil recruitment appears equally buoyant as I understand 300 first choice applications have been received for September 2016. Simon agreed that attendance is an area which needs further improvement and explained that penalty notices are being focussed on lower school pupils to contribute to achieving a higher overall rate which meets and then exceeds the national one. Simon, Rosemary felt, should be pleased with the environment and culture he has been creating at the school. As it states among his collection of motivational quotes around the school, 'nothing is impossible'.


Rosemary said that a vast amount of thought and planning has been put into getting an effective structuring staffing, creating the right curriculum, engaging pupils and planning how ongoing intervention can be effective. On top of this the school has drawn on outside best practice and support. She was particularly impressed by the RAG rated school development plan displayed on a wall and used to challenge and drive developments. Rosemary said she encountered many great features on her learning walk of the school and saw pupils thoroughly focussed and enjoying themselves whilst engaged in a wide range of activities. Through Karen she felt the trust was providing excellent support to Simon and the school.

We would find it very helpful to be kept up to date (most easily via RSC.EASTNELONDON@education.gsi.gov.uk) regarding the trust's developing expectations for results this summer at Woodlands. I would be pleased to receive a copy of these updates and the results in August when

available to you in the format that you use across the trust, at the times they are compiled to avoid any duplication of work.

We know that the work of academy trustees, school leaders and teachers is very demanding and we know that you do it because you believe that the pupils for whom you work deserve the best education possible. We are pleased to be working with you on this.

If Rosemary can be of further assistance please feel free to contact her directly at rosemary.prince@education.gsi.gov.uk

Yours sincerely


Tim Coulson
Regional Schools Commissioner, East of England and North East London

cc Simon Cox, Principal
cc Terry Reynolds, Local Chair of Governors
cc Karen Kerridge – CEO