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Mr G Wilce
The Headteacher
Torbay School
170b Torquay Road
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Devon
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Dear Mr Wilce

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Torbay School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 5 May 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff, Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the representative of the local authority who all made themselves available for discussions at short notice.

Since the last inspection, the local authority has replaced the governing body with an interim executive board which has assumed responsibility for governing the school.

As a result of the inspection on 13 October 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment which are low, particularly in literacy. Senior leaders have put in place systems for checking the levels at which pupils are working and they are using this information to set challenging targets and to monitor progress. Early evidence suggests a trend of improvement, although there is some variation between classes, with pupils making better progress in lessons which are taught by teachers who have specialist subject knowledge. The achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is constrained by the limited range of optional subjects and examination courses currently provided. The school is aware of this issue and has plans to extend the curriculum. Good relations exist between pupils and staff and the school provides an orderly environment. Occasional

incidents of inappropriate behaviour are generally managed effectively, although there is some inconsistency amongst staff in the implementation of the school behaviour policy. Senior leaders are aware that the number of exclusions has increased in the current academic year. They have conducted a detailed analysis of the circumstances of each case and are putting in place alternative strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour.

Assessment information is being used to plan lessons that match work more closely to pupils' different levels of ability. Almost all staff have visited other schools in the area to observe exemplary teaching and learning. This has improved the overall quality of teaching in the school, with an increasing number of teachers employing different strategies in lessons. Teachers generally plan interesting and varied lessons which often include practical activities and the use of information and communication technology. In these lessons pupils are motivated to learn and they settle quickly to work. In a minority of lessons, there is an over reliance on worksheets and too few opportunities for pupils to develop and discuss their own ideas. There are good examples where marking is linked to pupils' learning targets. However, the use of marking is not yet consistent across the school due to the lack of an agreed policy.

Support for pupils to become independent learners varies between classes. Pupils develop independence, for example when they take responsibility for equipment in practical lessons. Teaching assistants generally establish good relationships with pupils and are adept at helping to manage inappropriate behaviour and keeping pupils on task. However, in several lessons their role in supporting academic learning is not clearly defined and sometimes too much help is provided when pupils might be encouraged to do more for themselves. The use of targets to plan lessons has been extended since the last inspection. Pupils' understanding of, and involvement in, setting their learning targets has improved and in several subjects, for example in English and food technology, targets are set out clearly in pupils' work. The purpose of lessons is usually made clear by teachers, and some staff discuss with pupils how well they are meeting their individual learning targets. The time allowed for reviewing learning at the end of lessons is sometimes too brief, which limits the opportunity for pupils to reflect on what they have learned. A useful 'academic tutoring day' has been held which included parents and carers and pupils in discussions about pupils' progress and their future learning targets.

Subject leaders for numeracy and literacy are developing their roles and have suitable plans for improvement. The timescale for implementing some of these plans is quite long, especially given pupils' previous underachievement and the need to demonstrate impact quickly. Several strategies are taking hold which are raising pupils' attainment in numeracy and literacy, for example better assessment and the use of more varied resources. Subject leaders have not yet monitored comprehensively teaching and learning in their subjects across the school. Consequently, some of the best practice is not shared across all classes, especially in approaches to developing writing.

The local authority has provided good support since the school was given a notice to improve. It has intervened decisively to tackle weaknesses in governance by establishing the interim executive board, which includes headteachers and representatives from the local authority. The interim executive board is holding the school to account well and taking firm action to ensure there is a strong focus on identified areas for improvement. The first statement of action has been revised following an evaluation by Ofsted and it is fit for purpose. It now includes quantifiable targets for the areas of improvement on teaching and learning. Targets have been set for raising achievement which are contained in separate documents linked to the plan. These targets contain sufficient detail to enable the local authority to measure the impact of its support. Staff have benefited from an extensive range of support from the local authority improvement service, School Improvement Partner, staff in local schools and external advisers.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2010.

- Provide all pupils with activities that challenge them and motivate them by:
 - using assessment information to plan lessons that match the pupils' different attainment levels
 - developing teaching strategies that match pupils' different learning styles.
- Support pupils to become independent learners by:
 - involving them fully in agreeing their individual learning targets
 - incorporating their targets into lesson plans and activities
 - ensuring that all staff emphasise learning targets throughout the day
 - frequently checking in lessons that pupils fully understand their next steps in learning.
- Raise pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy by ensuring that subject leaders monitor teaching and give consistent guidance to all other teachers, especially those in Key Stages 2 and 3.