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17 January 2013

Mr John Sharples
Headteacher
Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School
Grammar School Road
Latchford
Warrington
Cheshire
WA4 1JL

Dear Mr Sharples

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

Following my visit with Barbara Comiskey Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 16 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, staff and students. The school improvement plan was evaluated, along with the local authority's action plan. We examined a sample of students' work and also detailed records that the school has been keeping to check on the quality of teaching.

Context

There have been no significant changes to staffing or the school's organisation since the inspection.

Main findings

The previous inspection has made school leaders much more determined to tackle areas of weakness. There is a growing understanding shared by teachers and students of what needs to be done to make Sir Thomas Boteler a good school. The school improvement plan has the right priorities, but it is not always clear how the school intends to check that actions taken are having the required impact.

Since the previous inspection, the school has received detailed information which shows that, although overall results in examinations are improving, students had not been making expected progress in English and mathematics. The school, supported by the local authority, has taken swift action to improve performance in these two subjects. Information provided by the school during the visit showed an improving trend in both English and mathematics.

Governors recognise that weaknesses in English and mathematics remain an obstacle to the school becoming good. The governing body is now reorganising to make sure that governors are more actively involved in monitoring students' progress in these key subjects.

Since the last inspection the system to check up on the quality of teaching has been completely overhauled. Lesson observations are now more closely linked to performance management and training has been put in place tailored to the needs of individual teachers to help them to improve their teaching. This is followed up by further observations and 'learning walks', where senior members of staff check that training is making a positive difference to practice in the classroom. In addition, senior staff now examine students' books regularly to make sure that they are being marked. This is helping to make marking across the school of better quality.

School leaders have not used performance management procedures to formally recognise good and outstanding teaching. The school is now in the process of reviewing performance management arrangements.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- continue to improve learning and progress in English and mathematics
- strengthen arrangements for performance management so that there is a clear relationship between pay progression and the quality of teaching
- increase the effectiveness of governance by ensuring that governors have a sharper focus on monitoring student progress, particularly in English and mathematics
- ensure that maximum benefit is derived from partnerships with outstanding institutions by seeking out practical advice on steps that can be taken to improve Sir Thomas Boteler CofE High School.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school draws well on local authority support. Since the previous inspection the school has been identified by the authority as a school requiring intensive support. Heads of department are receiving training to develop their leadership roles. The local authority holds half-termly meetings to challenge school leaders to demonstrate the progress they are making in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The school has been less successful in deriving benefit from a wide range of partnerships because there has been a lack of focus on precise, practical advice to help the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Warrington and as below.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority
- the academy chain where relevant
- Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead inspector.