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30 January 2013

Mr George Harris
Headteacher
Dene School of Technology
Manor Way
Peterlee
County Durham
SR8 5RL

Dear Mr Harris

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Dene School of Technology

Following my visit to your school on 29 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 given to me and for the time made available to discuss the actions that the school is taking to improve 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 November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this visit, separate meetings were held with the deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and one parent governor, a representative from the local authority and a group of parents. The school improvement plan was evaluated. School records from lesson observations, English and mathematics subject action plans, records of external consultant support, notes from a recent local authority review of geography, and up-to-date attendance data were scrutinised. The inspector also visited the English and mathematics teaching areas to review the workbooks of some students.

Context

The headteacher is currently off school and was not available to meet with HMI during this visit. There have been no staff changes and, with the exception of one governor who has left since the previous inspection, the governing body remains at full strength.

Main Findings

There have been several positive developments to support leadership and management since the previous inspection, which are ensuring that senior leaders and managers, including governors, have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement. Senior staff have developed effective working relationships with a local authority link officer, who is an experienced and successful headteacher seconded from another local authority school, together with targeted and on-going support from the principal of a successful local academy. The experience that these external partners have given is timely, and their additional expertise at senior management level has added to the confidence of existing senior staff and governors that they are developing their capacity to tackle the key issues from the recent inspection of the school.

The post-Ofsted school improvement plan has been written specifically to address the two areas for improvement from the recent inspection. Generally, it complements the extensive school development plan well, but there is some inevitable overlap, mainly in the priority, 'to raise the achievement and attainment for all', which contains some common actions to the first improvement area in the improvement plan of, 'raising achievement, particularly in English and mathematics, through ensuring that more teaching is consistently good or better'. The improvement plan is suitably broken down into separate actions against each sub-improvement aspect from the inspection report. Although the actions that the school has identified are suitable, some are insufficiently linked to the success measures that are intended to give senior leaders and governors a detailed overview of the progress being made against the specific action. This makes any on-going assessment of progress more difficult and less accurate than it should be. Furthermore, the school is yet to start regularly using up-to-date data, such as attendance, to modify and amend various actions in line with the progress being made.

Governing body involvement in the compilation of the improvement plan has been limited to date, as is their role in evaluating and monitoring the various actions. However, while working with external partners, especially the local authority link officer, plans are developing well to extend the governors' involvement by taking on more specific roles in evaluating and monitoring the work of the school, including the actions in the improvement plan.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take 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:

- ensure that school generated data on students' progress and attendance are used as on-going measures of the progress being made against the stated actions in the improvement plan
- make the links between actions and progress measures in the development plan much clearer in order to make it easier for senior managers, including governors, to accurately assess the progress that the school is making over the life of the improvement plan.

External support

The school is receiving timely and appropriate support from the local authority, external consultants, and the principal of a local academy.

The likely pattern of further visits will be monitoring the progress being made towards the school achieving at least a good overall effectiveness grade.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector