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Andrew Wellbeloved
Townsend CofE School
High Oaks
St Albans
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Dear Mr Wellbeloved

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Townsend CofE School

Following my visit to your school on 28 February 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, a representative of the local authority and a group of students. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Other documents were reviewed, including those referring to monitoring and evaluation and revised data on the progress students are making. The headteacher and I made a tour of the school to look at the quality of marking in students' books.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the recent inspection which judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

The school development plan has been suitably revised to focus on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Senior leaders are working with subject leaders to refine the plan further. In order to strengthen the power of the plan to drive improvements, clear milestones need to be added. The plan needs to include detail of how the progress in achieving the aims will be monitored and the role of governors in the monitoring process.

Actions to improve the quality of teaching include establishing a series of non-negotiable expectations, for example on when and how teachers mark students' work. Our scrutiny during the visit showed that the majority of teachers are meeting the expectations, with one example of outstanding practice, which included helpful dialogue between students and teacher. Teachers whose practice requires improvement have been identified and they have been given clear targets for improvement coupled with a plan to support them. The best practitioners are starting to be used to support weaker colleagues.

Data on the progress students' are making towards their targets are being used more effectively to ensure interventions match individual needs. Where the targets lack challenge or have already been met, they are being revised and parents and students kept well-informed of the process. Whole school targets currently lack a focus on more able students. Much attention has been paid to ensuring the assessments of students' work are accurate.

Subject leaders are being held to account for achievement in their subject areas with greater rigour. Clear guidelines have been established for line management meetings with common agendas, to ensure greater consistency.

Governors have undertaken their own self-evaluation using recognised standards to measure their performance. An external review has been commissioned and will take place soon. The school action plan details the actions needed to improve governance, but contains too little reference to how governors will check that the school's actions are making a difference to teaching and students' learning. A committee has been set up with the specific purpose of monitoring the progress on issues in the action plan.

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:

- strengthen the process for holding subject leaders to account for the progress students are making in their areas of responsibility
- develop targets for the proportion of students gaining the top grades in GCSE examinations
- sharpen improvement planning.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection, including a further monitoring visit in the next Autumn term.

External support

The local authority is providing effective support for the school. An adviser with expertise in both leadership and English has been working in the school. She has provided good support for senior leaders and has helped to improve the accuracy of assessments and effectiveness in English. In order to support the school to develop further, a partnership is being developed with a local successful school.

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

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector