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Ms Wendy Missons
Headteacher
Great Yarmouth (VA) High School
Salisbury Road
Great Yarmouth
NR30 4LS

Dear Ms Missons

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Great Yarmouth (VA) High School

Following my visit to your school on 13 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 on 13 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I had meetings with you and other senior leaders as well as representatives of the governing body and the local authority. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated together with other school documents and the school's lesson observation system. I undertook short visits to several classes to evaluate learning and assessment.

Context

Since the last inspection the school has recruited three new science teachers and new Heads of technology and science. A new Head of humanities has been appointed to start in September 2013.

Main findings

You are relatively new in post following a period of turbulence at the school. Your arrival has provided a steadying influence and, increasingly, this is allowing a clear view of the issues facing the school to emerge. You have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and this is shared by other senior managers.

Action plans for school improvement are purposeful and precise. They accurately define what needs to be done, how it will be done, who is responsible, and how success will be measured. This planning process is not yet complete at subject and departmental level however. This means that the ways in which overall weaknesses will be tackled at subject level are not yet finalised. Middle managers are being trained to undertake this work.

The school's use of data to measure its own performance is now systematic. For the most part this is giving an accurate picture of how well different groups and subjects are performing, enabling managers to monitor improvements. However this process is not wholly reliable because of some inaccurate, usually overgenerous, assessment of attainment. Strong and reliable assessment practice is found within English where it is used to structure classes and help to ensure that all students learn well. Because of this, achievement in English is improving and students now make expected progress.

The school's lesson observation system has recently been simplified and improved to allow a better evaluation of the learning taking place in class. This is allowing instances of students being taught at too low a level to be identified and tackled. Good teaching practice is identified, but opportunities to share it are not always exploited. The best practice remains isolated.

The school is making strenuous efforts to improve weak attendance and persistent absence. Actions include a much closer liaison with parents and other agencies. These efforts have led to significant improvements so that both attendance and persistent absence are approaching national averages.

Governors have supported the school well through a period of considerable turbulence. They are experienced and well-qualified to challenge the school where appropriate and do not hesitate to do so. Their monitoring of the progress being made by the school has improved, although target-setting sometimes lacks deadlines for completion. They recognise their need to undergo training in the analysis of school performance data so that they can be less dependent on information and analyses provided by school leaders.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that the assessment of attainment is accurate in all subject areas and that this information is used effectively in class so that all students learn to the best of their ability.
- Ensure that the simplified lesson observation system monitors learning in class effectively, and that it is consistently used to ensure that all students are challenged.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has paired the school with an outstanding school in the county so that best practice can be shared more effectively. As yet this has had little impact however.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector