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Ms S Japp
Headteacher
Beverley High School
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Beverley
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Dear Ms Japp

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Beverley High School, East Riding of Yorkshire

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, middle managers, a group of teaching staff, three members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement/action plan was evaluated and HMI visited two lessons.

Context

Since the last inspection, one senior member of staff has been absent for an extended period.

Main findings

Senior leaders, governors and staff have been able to engage with the findings of the last inspection, which represented a sharp fall in the school's grading, and are now moving forwards. Substantial work on the development plan has been led by

the headteacher, working in close partnership with the local authority which provided the template. Staff were able to contribute some ideas, but otherwise have had relatively limited involvement with it and it was only shared with them very recently. Middle leaders have recently started working on their own plans. More could be done to engage staff at all levels and governors in planning and reviewing activities.

The school plan is generally thorough, indicates for the most part who is responsible for what, and provides clear criteria for judging success. However much of the evaluation is the generic responsibility of the senior team and depends too much on exam results; there needs to be a wider range of techniques for evaluating progress towards milestones so that strategies can be assessed and amended mid-year if necessary. Given the weaknesses in English and mathematics in 2012, these departments need to be more clearly reflected in the plan with success criteria appropriately agreed.

Actions relating to improving the work of leaders and managers at all levels could be expanded to specify how senior leadership, including that of the headteacher, should improve – including actions to contribute to this, and success criteria.

The plan is made complex by trying to set a milestone for every action in every period. It could be simplified by linking milestones to the specific times when actions are taking place, for example by evaluating the impact of training in the days afterwards but also two months later, and by planning activities for the next 18 months at least.

Work on raising achievement in the sixth form is focused on matching the curriculum to student needs, with staff citing improved entry arrangements. Although the joint head of sixth form is responsible for the improved outcomes, she has too little control over the quality of teaching to be fairly held accountable in this area and the school lacks an evaluation of post-16 teaching specifically or actions to improve it. The sixth form has its own plan, which covers both schools in the consortium, but better ways need to be established for integrating this with the main school plan.

Staff can see that speedy action has been taken to redress the school's decline and that most of it is appropriate. They talked about how the focus had shifted from attainment – which is normally high – to a robust check on progress. They need to be engaged more in discussing initiatives and evaluating their impact – for example, strategies for teaching and assessment are seen as appropriate, but needing some tailoring to suit all contexts. Staff are keen to become outstanding but feel that they need greater understanding of what outstanding teaching looks like; the sharing of excellent practice, inside and outside the school, would be a suitable approach.

Governors are concerned and committed, but they have tended to have an arms-length relationship with the activities of the school. Staff and middle leaders gave varying reports of their contact with governors. Typical of this is that reports on

subject departments to the governors have been made by the headteacher, but now governors understand that heads of department could make reports directly to them. Governors could also play a greater role in setting actions and criteria for the improvement of all levels of senior leadership, and by engaging with the local authority over a plan for their own development.

The school has an active local partnership and has worked with another school on improving quality assurance. However it does not have strong links with any outstanding schools and does not have a plan for giving staff access to outstanding teaching practice; this is an omission which is not being filled by the school's own senior 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:

- strengthen the content of the plan by setting targets for the growth of outstanding teaching, the quality of teaching in the sixth form and specific targets for English, mathematics and other areas as appropriate
- setting out what will be done to improve the impact of senior leaders, the headteacher and the governing body, and the actions that will be taken to evaluate this
- improve the engagement of all staff in planning, consultation and evaluation
- use partnerships and any other appropriate approaches so that staff have a more confident grasp of what outstanding practice looks like

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 been heavily involved in the school's development planning and quickly arranged two effective 'diagnostic days' in the school. They have reinforced the message that senior team lesson gradings were too generous, and middle managers report that they felt the local authority provided robust challenge in the evaluation of progress data. Individuals gave examples of how their practice had changed following challenge on the 'diagnostic day,' notably around the use of targets based on progress rather than just attainment.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Gray
Her Majesty's Inspector