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Mr Keith Crawford
Kingstone High School
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Dear Mr Crawford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kingstone High Academy

Following my visit to your school on 12 July 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 academy 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your assistant headteachers and the leaders responsible for English, mathematics and Modern Foreign Languages. I also met four members of the Governing Body including the Chair of the Governors. I also spoke with the person that is to provide external support to the Governing Body and three teachers that had joined the academy recently. I scrutinised information about the progress made by pupils, academy improvement plans, the minutes of the meetings of the governing body and the academy's records of its recent monitoring activity. I made short visits to 9 lessons in English, Mathematics and Modern Foreign Languages.

Context

Since the previous inspection one governor has left the Governing Body. A parent governor and a community governor have joined the governing body. An art teacher has recent joined the academy.

Main findings

There is evidence that pupils are beginning to make better progress in English as result of the better teaching in this subject. The better use of assessment is improving the progress younger pupils are making in Modern Foreign Languages. A minority of teaching seen was good. The strengths included high levels of engagement by students who were critically engaged with interesting lesson content; for instance, identifying the dialogue that would create tension in a freeze frame scene from a Hitchcock movie. However, the majority of teaching required improvement mainly because the pace of learning was too slow. Teachers are adopting lots of new approaches but many of these are not being used effectively enough. For instance, potentially very useful reviews of learning were not very effective because they took too long or were not sufficiently well focussed on the key learning within a lesson.

Additional improvement plans have been produced to cover all the issues identified at the May 2013 inspection. A sensible sequence of actions has been drawn up to bring about improvements to teaching. Appropriately challenging quantifiable targets have yet to be added, including some aimed at closing the gaps for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium. There are too few opportunities for the Governing Body to be involved in checking the how well the school is improving. The governing body is taking its responsibilities seriously and is determined to improve the quality of leadership. An appropriate review of governance is planned for September. Rather belatedly, the governing body has correctly recognised that a committee structure is needed to enable it to effectively scrutinise the work of the academy.

There are strengths in leadership. The leadership of teaching and learning has resulted in pupils experiencing better and more enjoyable lessons. The senior leader responsible for teaching and learning has the confidence of staff. Subject leaders work well with members of their departments: for example, English teachers are supporting each other well in collaboratively planning lessons. There is a commendable desire amongst middle leaders to think longer term and ensure that younger pupils are much better prepared to succeed in the courses they undertake in Key Stage 4. There are signs that subject leaders are improving their monitoring and evaluation skills: for instance, the head of mathematics is using tests to more precisely identify the weakness that need to be addressed in lessons.

The staff survey at the inspection in May 2013 raised doubts about the overall effectiveness of senior leadership. The Governing Body's meetings with staff have not been sufficient to fully restore staff and governors' confidence in the senior leadership team. Unresolved, this is a major barrier to further improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The following further action should be taken:

- The governing body should urgently implement an external review of leadership and management and implement any recommendations in order to restore the full confidence of staff and governors.
- Identify further external support and challenge for the Governing Body and for senior leaders.
- Take steps to ensure staff can effectively implement the new approaches to teaching that have been introduced.

External support

The provider of the external review of governance has a good awareness of the improvements needed. The Governing Body and senior leaders do not have sufficient access to external support and challenge.

I will visit the academy before December 2013 to monitor the progress you are making.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector