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Mr Stephen Cox
Headteacher
Ribblesdale School
Queen's Road
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Dear Mr Cox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ribblesdale School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking incisive and urgent action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that teachers are confident in challenging higher attaining students to make and exceed expected progress.
- Revise the criteria by which the school will know that it has been successful in combatting any bullying that occurs.
- Explore the reasons for the school's underperformance in geography and take action to raise standards.
- Involve parents in evaluating the impact of the school's improvement strategy.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Short visits were made to several lessons and informal discussions were held with students and staff. The school's records of monitoring teaching were considered and the single central record was checked.

Context

Since the previous inspection, seven teachers have retired or left to take up new posts. New subject leaders have been appointed in English, mathematics and science. Four other new teachers have joined the staff, two of whom are newly qualified.

Main findings

The school's unvalidated GCSE results for 2013 indicate a 6% increase in the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics, in comparison with 2012. Attainment rose in science, identified in the previous inspection as an area of weakness, although middle and higher attaining students made less progress in science than in the other core subjects. Attainment in other subjects was variable, with strong improvements in product design, art and media where considerable development has been undertaken to improve feedback to students and create more engaging and relevant tasks. The performance of higher attaining students in mathematics increased. There has been a decline in students' achievement in geography. The school's overall performance was in line with its predictions. A rigorous tracking system is in place that enables achievement to be closely monitored. Projections indicate that there will be a further improvement in 2014, on the basis of students' test results and teachers' on-going assessments of their performance.

The school's improvement plan has been rewritten. It addresses the weaknesses identified in the inspection report and highlights the roles of key staff and governors, including link governors who have responsibility for monitoring specific areas of work. The plan is comprehensive and detailed; it provides leaders and governors with a suitable structure to enable monitoring and evaluation. The essence of the plan has been distilled into a useful summary so that the school community has a clear view of the school's priorities and goals. The inspection outcomes and improvement plan have been shared with parents through an open evening.

The governing body's committee structure has been changed to reflect the urgency of the school's priority of raising standards. A standards and effectiveness committee meets half termly to consider students' achievement and discuss strategies to accelerate their progress. Individual governors have responsibility for overseeing subject areas and improvement priorities.

You, one governor and two senior leaders attended the Ofsted 'Getting to Good' conference prior to the monitoring inspection and used materials from it as the basis for a staff briefing focused on the steps needed to ensure that the school is judged good at its next inspection. This was well-received; staff morale is high and there is evident determination to ensure that Ribblesdale rapidly becomes at least good.

A carefully planned coaching programme has been launched that enables teachers to learn from each other's practice in different subjects. Teachers have good quality data available on students' performance and are responding to the challenge of improving their planning to meet the needs of different groups of students, although observations indicate that this is not yet consistently evident in lessons.

The school has conducted an extensive survey of students' views of behaviour and is in the process of analysing outcomes. The school's plan emphasises zero tolerance of bullying but does not give a clear enough indication of how improvement in behaviour will be measured. Students who spoke with me said that they feel safe and recognise that the school's anti-bullying message is strong. They appreciate the work undertaken by the school leaders to improve site safety, including the more visible presence of staff around the building. New entrants to Year 7 praised the school's excellent transition programme that has been developed further to promote high expectations and continuity in subjects as students move from primary to secondary education.

Improvements that you have instigated since taking up headship of the school in October 2013 are valued by staff, students and governors.

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 school has received extensive support from the local authority adviser who has worked with senior leaders and governors to plan improvements and provide objective quality assurance. She has brokered support from local authority consultants for the newly appointed subject leaders in English, mathematics and science. In addition, consultant support is being provided for modern foreign languages and behaviour management. It is too early for the impact of this work to be judged. Support has been planned in consultation with school leaders and with a clear link to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector