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30 September 2013

Annabel Stoddart
Abbot Beyne School
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Osborne Street
DE15 0JL

Dear Mrs Stoddart

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Abbot Beyne School

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 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 in April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- enable all students to make the progress they should by ensuring that teachers in every subject take responsibility for improving students' literacy skills
- ensure members of the restructured governing body continue to receive appropriate training for their roles and have the opportunity to learn from good practice in governance in high performing schools
- maintain the pace of improvement evident at this early stage and, in particular, maintain the focus on improving the progress students make over time by ensuring that all teaching becomes at least good.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your senior leaders, with students and with the Acting Chair and other members of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation also took place with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement and action plans

were evaluated and the school's own data about summer 2013 attainment results were reviewed. You took me on a tour of the Linnell site, where we made short visits to a number of lessons.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement, five teachers have left the school and four new teachers started in September 2013. The Chair of the Governing Body retired in summer 2013 and an Acting Chair is currently in post. The Governing Body has been restructured and a new Chair and Vice Chair are about to be appointed.

Main findings

Attainment data for summer 2013 show a mixed picture. The proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at grades C or above, including English and mathematics, declined while the proportion gaining at least a grade C in GCSE mathematics exceeded school predictions and the national average. Gaps in attainment and progress between students eligible for the pupil premium funding and other students narrowed for some measures. At A level, pass rates improved. Leaders in the school are analysing the data, giving particular attention to individual subjects where predicted outcomes were much higher than actual outcomes, with the aim of taking firm action to ensure such discrepancies do not occur in future.

Challenging targets are being set for students and higher expectations are evident. The curriculum has been revised and is now tailored to meet the needs of students more closely, for example with a range of vocational courses to supplement the academic provision. Students are very positive about the education they receive at the school. They particularly like the Learn or Lose out (LoLo) system, which they say is leading to improved behaviour in lessons, and the Period 4 additional sessions that enable them to get extra support to improve their learning.

A clear focus on improving the quality of teaching in order to increase the rate at which students make progress is now apparent. A wide range of staff development opportunities support this, including encouraging all teachers to learn from the good practice that is already available in the school. Rigorous monitoring systems are in place to identify where teaching requires improvement. Senior leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching are accurate because of the intensive training they have received, the clearer links made to the quality of students' learning over time, and a change to the observation process so that teachers no longer receive prior warning about which of their lessons will be visited. When teaching is judged to require improvement, appropriate individualised teacher support and training programmes are provided. Evidence indicates that this support is leading to improvements in teachers' performance.

The reading ages of all students have been assessed. Evidence indicates that the well-directed support for those students with the lowest reading ages is helping

them to improve their reading ability. More general literacy support is available for all students at Key Stage 3 in the form of weekly dedicated reading time in English lessons and, for all students at Key Stages 3 and 4, in the form of weekly dedicated reading time in registration periods. However, it is not clear how effective this more general provision is as there is little evidence to suggest that students' progress in developing their reading skills is being monitored. Nor is there evidence that teachers in all subjects are taking responsibility for improving the skills of their students, for example, in relation to writing and oracy.

A faculty structure has been introduced in order to improve the quality of subject middle leadership. High quality data are available to all teachers but it is not yet clear how well this data is used by them to plan lessons that enable students of all abilities to make the progress they should.

Improvement plans are focused clearly on relevant areas and include appropriate mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of actions and evaluating their impact. Plans indicate that many initiatives to bring about improvement are now in place and some are beginning to have an impact on the quality of teaching and the progress students make.

The headteacher is proactive in driving improvement. She is ensuring that all staff are more accountable and that judgements about their performance, as leaders and as teachers, is now linked clearly to the progress students make. Sharper systems for monitoring performance are in place and more regular monitoring ensures concerns are identified and dealt with early and systematically.

An external review of governance has been undertaken and the findings have been used by governors to produce an action plan for improvement. Governors are now more informed and understand the importance of challenging school leaders about areas that need improvement. The governing body is being restructured and new roles are in the process of being allocated.

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

As well as chairing half termly review meetings about the impact of the school's improvement actions, the local authority representative has been helpful in enabling the headteacher to access additional external support. An external audit of governance has been undertaken, and an external consultant has been working with senior leaders to ensure accuracy in their judgements about the quality of teaching. Links with high performing schools are supporting the improvement agenda. Some teachers are benefiting from a six-week teacher improvement programme provided by John Taylor High School and support from The Streetly Academy in the areas of leadership, mathematics and special educational needs is currently being organised.

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

Yours sincerely

Gwendoline Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector