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26 September 2013

Mrs Liz Dunstan
Principal
Tor Bridge High School
Miller Way
Estover
Plymouth
PL6 8UN

Dear Mrs Dunstan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Tor Bridge High 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 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 academy should take further action to:

- make sure all teachers constantly assess students' progress during lessons and adapt the activities, pace and questions so that all students make as much progress as possible
- add measurable outcomes to the academy improvement plan for each term, such as the amount of progress students will make and the proportion of good and better teaching, to help governors in monitoring the school's improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students and members of the Governing Body, and a telephone call was made to a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy improvement plan was evaluated. You and other senior leaders jointly observed some lessons with me. I examined the academy's information on students' progress and the system for monitoring teachers' performance management.

Main findings

The academy's extensive procedures for monitoring the academic progress of all students are driving improvements in teaching and learning. Higher targets are now being set for the students, including in the sixth form, and shared with them and their parents and carers each half-term. Meetings are held with staff each half-term to identify appropriate intervention for any underachieving students. As a result, previous gaps in the achievement of more able students and of students supported by pupil premium funding, are closing. Students are making better progress in English but not in mathematics. The academy is rightly focusing on improving the quality of teaching in mathematics and science to raise standards in these subjects.

In a Year 11 science lesson, students were making rapid progress because the teacher constantly asked questions to check and extend their understanding and adapted the activities and pace to match their different stages of learning. Not all teachers are skilled in adapting lessons in this way. In all the lessons observed, teachers paid good attention to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills and gave them opportunities to apply these independently. Teachers' marking is improving and students say this is helping them to know how to improve their work. This was evident in students' response to the marking.

The academy's improvement planning is clearly leading to effective action being taken to tackle weaker teaching. The principal is developing the skills of all leaders and managers appropriately in monitoring the impact of improvements, including through linking lesson observations with information on students' progress, scrutiny of students' work and teachers' planning, and discussions with students. The improvement plan, however, does not include enough measurable outcomes to help senior leaders and governors evaluate the rate of progress in all areas each term. This is resulting in uneven progress across subjects.

The governing body has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in students' achievement and the quality of teaching. It is making sure that procedures for the performance management of teachers are being reviewed appropriately. The governing body is aware that it needs to review its roles and responsibilities so that its work is more evenly delegated.

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 academy is making effective use of a wide range of external support. The support includes an external consultant who supports leaders and managers in evaluating improvements. It also includes links with other schools in Devon through the Challenge Partners initiative and with schools nationally through the Best Practice programme. The impact of the support is seen in improvements in teaching and learning, particularly in science. It is recommended that the governing body accesses additional external support to help it in its reorganisation of roles and responsibilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater

Her Majesty's Inspector