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Dr Rowena Blencowe
Headteacher
Trentham High School
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Dear Dr Blencowe

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Trentham High School

Following my visit to your school on 21 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, Chair of the Governing Body, members of the senior leadership team and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection seven teachers have left the school and four have been appointed. There is a new Chair of the Governing Body and its committee structure has been reorganised and strengthened. There are plans for the school to become an academy in 2014.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school has responded very positively to the section 5 inspection and the headteacher has introduced a number of robust and rigorous initiatives to ensure that improvement plans are much more tightly focused on the key areas that require change. The senior team supports her well in this work and, together with strengthened support from middle managers, the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning have been

much improved. Plans helpfully cross-reference to challenging and measurable achievement targets and there are clear logs of actions and their impact. The new assessment software for staff computers has sharpened the way teachers identify how well all groups of students are making progress. This process has helped leaders and managers to track overall school and departmental performance more accurately and enabled middle managers to identify quickly when, and in which lessons, student progress slackens. Approaches to addressing such underachievement are planned to be appropriately supportive but also challenging when needed.

There is a new marking policy which aims to indicate clearly to students how they can improve their work and how well they are making progress to attaining their individual targets. Part of this process enables students to respond to teachers' comments and these student observations are followed up carefully by staff. In this way, students are being involved more in their learning and they have better information to use when they discuss their progress with staff and parents. A greater focus on making sure lessons enable all students to participate well according to their different abilities is beginning to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

The governing body is now much more aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and, following good training and support from the local authority, is becoming better at holding the school to account for its performance. Governors are now linked to subject departments and heads of departments, on invitation, attend governing body meetings to make reports and keep the governing body up to date on developments.

The local authority has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and there are good management meetings which keep the school's performance under review. The statement of action produced by the local authority is very clear on what needs to be achieved and by when, with clear milestones for evaluation of progress. The school is also supported well by its School Improvement Partner, who undertakes rigorous reviews of progress.

Understandably, much of the new work now being undertaken is in its infancy and there is not currently enough evidence to demonstrate clearly that new policies and procedures are bringing about the required improvements in student achievement over time. The school is fully aware of this and is determined to ensure that this positive beginning is the catalyst for a well-founded renaissance in its fortunes.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director of People Services for Stoke-On-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm

Additional Inspector