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Steve Fisher
Kingstone High School
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Dear Mr Fisher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kingstone High School

Following my visit to your school with Gwen Coates HMI on 19 November 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 us 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 second 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.

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:

- ensure the Governing Body receives better quality assessment information that allows them to more effectively check the improvements the school is making.
- improve the teaching of all subjects by focussing more on promoting students' literacy and communication skills
- ensure students have more opportunities to take responsibility for making improvements in response to marking and increased self/peer assessment
- ensure the minutes of Governing Body's meetings better capture the challenge the Governing Body is providing.
- explore further the opportunities for working in partnership with others.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the Governing Body, including the Chair, to discuss the action taken since the previous inspection. A meeting was held with the most recently appointed staff. A meeting was also held with the headteacher of Wigmore Academy. The academy improvement plan, the minutes of the Governing Body meetings, the records of the academy's monitoring of teaching, including assessment information were evaluated. 17 short visits were made to lessons to evaluate teaching.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit in July 2013, the executive headteacher has left the academy. One of the academy's deputy headteachers is currently acting executive headteacher. The Chair of the Governing Body has resigned and is no longer a governor. A new Chair of the Governing Body and two new governors were elected at the start of term. Since the previous monitoring visit a new committee has been established to focus on the monitoring of standards. The school has also commenced working in partnership with Wigmore Academy, an outstanding school in North Herefordshire.

Main findings

Governors acted swiftly in response to the previous monitoring letter and implemented a rigorous review of leadership and management led by a highly respected National Leader in Education. Although it is early days, the changes made in response to the review have greatly increased the confidence staff have in the overall leadership of the school. Staff highlighted the clearer vision that is now emerging and the published evaluation cycle that makes clear what is happening. Teachers spoke positively about the greater support that now follows evaluations of teaching. The creation of a new committee that focuses on standards means the Governing Body is now able to more effectively review the progress the academy is making. The Governing Body is asking more challenging questions and has a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the academy. However, this greater expertise is not yet apparent in the minutes of the governing body meetings.

Although middle leaders spoke positively about the assessment information they are now receiving, there continue to be shortcomings in what is made available to the Governing Body; for instance, it is still not easy to evaluate the progress the academy is making closing the very large achievement gap for pupils eligible for pupil premium, that was apparent in the 2012 results. Neither is it straightforward to use the assessment information to gauge the progress the school is making on improving teaching. This is partly due to a lack of rigour in some of the judgements made about achievement in the past. Reassuringly, senior leaders are aware of the weaknesses, including those associated with teaching. As a result of the leadership

review, the school improvement plan has been improved. At the previous visit, a development plan had been produced that responded to the May inspection issues and the previous school improvement plan was also running alongside this. Greater clarity and simplicity has been achieved through the creation of a single combined plan.

Improvements to teaching were apparent on this visit. For instance, excellent questioning was observed in English and history lessons. Teachers probed students' understanding with well-considered follow-up questions. Students were also required to critically comment on each other's responses. Although marking has improved there remain inconsistencies; for instance, not all teachers ensure pupils have clear targets for improvement. Although there are some noteworthy exceptions, students do not have sufficient opportunity to identify for themselves what they need to do improve. Opportunities are also missed to promote pupils' literacy and communication skills through all subjects. For instance, an information communication and technology lesson could have been made more challenging if pupils had addressed targets related to literacy. There are also inconsistencies in how mis-spellings are highlighted.

External support

The partnership with Wigmore Academy is relatively recent but has provided the school with helpful, critical feedback. It is providing greater access to very good and outstanding practice. The leadership review was undertaken quickly and efficiently. It highlights very clearly the issues that need to be addressed if the school is to be judged as good at its next inspection. Actions taken in response to this review have already had a significantly positive impact on the school. The Governing Body is very sensibly exploring the possibility of even closer partnerships with other schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector