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James Evans
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Evans

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Torbay School

Following my visit to your school on 12 December 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 October 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:

- assess students' academic and social skills when they enter the school in order to judge subsequent progress more accurately
- identify students who have low levels of reading and writing and set precise targets for improvement which are used across different subjects
- make sure that the range of examination courses offered at Key Stage 4 provides enough challenge, especially for the most capable students
- establish links with a good or better school that provides education for students with behavioural, emotional, and social needs.

Evidence

During the visit, I held discussions with you, the head of school, other senior leaders, a group of students, a representative of the local authority, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and teachers' lesson plans were evaluated. I made visits to two lessons during which I looked at students' work.

Main findings

Since the section 5 inspection in October, you, your leadership team, staff and governors have collectively taken a range of positive actions to improve the school.

A new system for recording regularly students' behaviour and engagement in lessons has been introduced. This gives senior leaders an overview of behaviour which helps them to identify patterns and to take action that prevents problems arising. School data show the number of incidents is falling and that students are more willing to learn. In the few lessons visited there was a positive climate for learning.

Governors, senior leaders and staff are determined to focus the school's efforts on the quality of learning and on raising achievement. A new 'celebrating success' policy has been introduced which sets out opportunities for students to have their achievements recognised, for example through weekly assemblies. The curriculum at KS3 has been reviewed to provide greater breadth which will take effect from January 2014. While students at Key Stage 4 report they enjoy their courses of study, it is uncertain whether the range of courses provides enough challenge for some of the most capable students.

Senior leaders are developing well their skills in monitoring and improving teaching and learning. There has been a focus on providing more challenge and pace in lessons. New planning has been introduced which makes clearer what students are expected to learn in lessons. Several students have low levels of reading and writing and targets for improvement are not always broken into small enough steps to help quicken the rate of progress. Senior leaders are aware that students' weak writing skills need tackling and are developing suitable plans for improvement.

Historic information does not always describe accurately students' levels of attainment. This makes it difficult to demonstrate the progress students have made while attending the school. The school has introduced a programme to develop students' social skills which has potential for recording gains in students' social and emotional development.

The new school improvement plan is comprehensive and outlines the actions that will be taken to tackle each area for improvement identified in the inspection report. Useful 'milestones' have been added recently that will enable senior leaders and the

governing body to check that the actions are on track term by term. There is some overlap in the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and the school is currently reviewing job descriptions to ensure responsibilities are clearer. The governing body has a good knowledge of the action plan. It possesses a wide range of expertise and is working closely with the school. A new staff appraisal policy has been introduced which links teachers' salary progression with students' progress.

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 is making good use of external support. The local authority has provided help to senior leaders on reviewing the needs of students with special educational needs. An independent consultant has conducted joint lesson observations with senior leaders to help them judge teaching more effectively. Visits have been made to an outstanding primary school to help evaluate teaching. The school has not yet been able to observe examples of good or better teaching in a high performing school that educates students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector