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Haydn Stride
Headteacher
Longhill High School
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Dear Mr Stride

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Longhill High School

Following my visit to your school on 14 January 2014, 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:

- Intensify your drive to ensure that teachers challenge all students, including the most able, and that marking is consistent and helpful
- Ensure that your school development plan is concise, that the impact of all actions has a completion date and that the person evaluating the impact is clearly named
- Make sure that all areas for improvement are overtly referenced in the development plan

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the two deputy headteachers, and four members of the governing body. I also met with representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated. In addition, I looked at some students' work from a range of year groups and walked around the school with you to look at students' learning.

Context

There have been no changes to staffing since the last inspection.

Main findings

You and the senior team have responded to the findings of the last inspection with determination and a keen desire to move the school forward. You have taken on board the feedback from a range of external bodies and have undertaken vigorous reflection on key changes that need to be made. Most importantly you have identified that the systems for data collection and analysis now need to support better thinking and practice on the part of teachers about how to move students forward. You have swiftly addressed this by refocusing teachers and holding them directly to account for how well the students learn and make progress. You have provided some training for teachers in how to make sure that they give clear guidance to students on how to improve their work. The success of this will depend on how well teachers are able to use the information about student progress to do this; it is not yet consistent or embedded. During our walk around the school, teachers were using the newly introduced 'class profile sheets' to help them support students who were not achieving as well as they should. Because it is based on classroom centred feedback discussions, this is beginning to work well by engaging students more actively in their own progress.

Student work examined during the visit did not show a consistent level of effective feedback from staff to students. Some teachers had invited student responses to improve their work; others appeared to rely on unhelpful and vague comments such as 'good'.

It is good to see that leaders' lesson observations are now keenly focused on the way in which previously underperforming students are learning, and are supported by progress data which allows you to be much sharper in making judgements about the quality of teaching.

You have recognised that staff and governors need to understand and have easier access to data about students' progress nationally so that they can begin to measure school students' progress against these. This has helped the governing body to be

much clearer in their evaluation of school standards, and better able to check that appropriate progress is being made. Your move towards the use of levels of progress to measure the success of departments and teachers is also positive.

Your school development plan broadly references the issues identified in the last inspection, but not sharply enough. There is no graduated time line against which to measure the impact of any actions taken, and you have not identified individuals who will evaluate the success of outcomes. More detailed improvement plans exist for different areas in addition to the overall plan; this is an overly complicated way of communicating concrete aims to the school community. Governors agreed that the development plan should be honed and that priorities should be clearly identified to help them in their monitoring role.

The creation of the 'Focus Centre' for Year 11 students identified in the autumn term as at-risk of underachieving has supported a marked improvement in attendance and exclusions. Students receive small group teaching in core and other subjects, and your current data shows that they are making progress at the same rate as their peer groups. The large majority of these students are eligible for the pupil premium funding and it is encouraging to see standards rising for this group.

Governors reported that the outcome of the last inspection has 'generated a renewed vigour and appetite' to ensure that the school becomes good. They demonstrated a growing understanding of the need to challenge you using external data and are about to take part in training to help them do this more effectively. They found the external governance review, carried out by a National Leader of Governance, to be extremely helpful; future training has been arranged to address identified needs. It has already resulted in a review of meeting agendas to ensure a more rigorous focus.

Governors will shortly be visiting the school to see how well subject leaders are responding to the new drive for effective feedback to students and what difference this is making to students' levels of progress. They are acutely aware of the requirement to account for the substantial pupil premium funding and that this must demonstrate impact on the achievement of this group of students. The gap in progress between those Year 11 students eligible for this funding and those who are not, has widened in English and narrowed slightly in mathematics. The progress that Year 11 students are now making in English is in line with national expectations; in mathematics it is still well below national expectations, however it has improved by 6% this year.

Governors are supportive of the leadership of the school; they sensibly expressed a cautious confidence in the speed with which changes will make an impact.

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 local authority is supporting the school well. A School Partnership Advisor has been appointed and he holds three-weekly meetings with you to ensure that rapid progress is being made towards the school becoming good. The local authority arranged the external review of governance which has taken place, and will continue to work with governors. The local authority strategy board will hold termly meetings with you to check that your actions are making a positive difference. A local authority appointed teaching and learning lead teacher for the local schools partnership is based at Longhill High. Collaborative work with local headteachers, arranged by the local authority has also been very useful. The local authority representatives echoed your reflections that over complex systems had been a barrier to student progress. However, they expressed increasing confidence that your commitment to making sure that teachers use data effectively and to holding them to account will raise standards. Visits to other schools are a good idea and will be arranged shortly.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector