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Mr Steve Smith
Interim Headteacher
Bedale High School
Fitzalan Road
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North Yorkshire
DL8 2EQ

Dear Mr Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bedale High School, North Yorkshire

Following my visit to your school on 21 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- Ensure that senior leaders' checks on the quality and impact of the school's work are finely focused to identify the difference they are making to students' learning.
- Strengthen plans to ensure that targets are clearer and dates on which to review and assess impact on the school's effectiveness are included to help governors track progress of improvement initiatives.

Evidence

During the monitoring inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders and the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's latest improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documents were discussed including student progress data and the outcomes of the monitoring of teaching, behaviour, attendance and the impact of performance management.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection a headteacher has been appointed and the acting headteacher returned to his role as acting deputy headteacher. The headteacher is absent with ill health and an interim headteacher joined the school at the start of term to temporarily lead the school until the substantive postholder returns in the summer term. The deputy headteacher has returned from illness. Four teachers have left the school and five temporary teachers have joined.

Main findings

The impact of the school's work to improve provision during the 2012-13 school year did not have a significant impact on the achievement of students at the end of Key Stage 4. In addition, the pace of improvement since the last monitoring inspection has been uneven. It slowed and it is only in the last term that many changes have been implemented and actions are starting to accelerate. Attendance is improving again following a dip in 2013, but overall it remains lower than at the time of the section 5 inspection.

Difficulties and delays in implementing the school's systems of analysing and sharing data have only recently been overcome. Senior leaders and governors now have a greater range of information about all aspects of the school's work, although information is not brought together sufficiently by the senior leadership team and governors to enable them to see the overall picture so that they can quickly identify issues and barriers, and act swiftly to drive improvement. An absence of dates for review and measurable targets for success in the school's new plans is not helping the newly reformed, smaller governing body, to spot when progress starts to slow.

Middle leaders are responding to the higher expectations of them to improve the performance of their teams. Their role in reviewing and managing teachers' performance was strengthened last term and they are being firmly held to account by the interim headteacher through his insistence that the targets they are setting for staff are sharp, measurable and focused on improving outcomes for students. Middle leaders welcome the additional information they now receive; they report that they feel empowered and are starting to use it to identify where they need to focus their efforts to improve the performance of staff and students.

The intensive focus on refining teachers' practice through training, coaching and individual support programmes, has yet to impact fully on students' learning and progress. For example, the proportion of Year 11 pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics in 2013 showed little change to previous years. More improvement is anticipated in English and mathematics this year. Students receiving additional support through the pupil premium funding are beginning to make faster progress towards closing gaps in attainment. In contrast to this positive picture, the measures that the school has put in place have yet to make any demonstrable difference to close the gap in progress of students with special educational needs and disabilities and their peers in the school. The reason for variations in students' progress across Years 7, 8 and 9, and in the progress of different groups is currently being investigated by the school.

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 has rallied to support the school and played a key role in helping governors to secure additional leadership support during the period immediately after the inspection and subsequently during the headteacher's absence. Training by local authority officers has improved confidence and governors understanding of performance data. Partnerships initiated by the headteacher shortly before his absence are beginning to provide useful support to improve leadership and teaching; for example, links with King James's School, Knaresborough, a good school, are enabling teachers and senior leaders to reflect on and improve teaching. Access to further additional external support is being explored actively by the school with a group of North Yorkshire headteachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector