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Jim Parker
Headteacher
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Dunstable Road
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Dear Mr Parker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Manshead CofE VA Upper School

Following my visit to your school on 5 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 6 November 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:

- extend opportunities for middle leaders to work collaboratively in order to share the good practice more widely
- capitalise on the new student voice initiatives in order to reduce the variability in the quality of teaching by giving you additional insights to inform your evaluations.

Evidence

During the visit, I held a number of meetings to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I met you and other senior leaders, subject leaders, students and

representatives of the governing body. I held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school action plan. I observed teaching in English, modern languages and humanities.

Main findings

Staffing in English is now stable and you have appointed a new subject leader who will take up her post in May. Subject leaders are analysing data and the outcomes of mock examinations to refine their schemes of work. You have re-launched the school's marking policy and are checking carefully that teachers are meeting the requirements to mark work regularly and provide feedback to students. Students confirm that the process is helping them to understand how to improve their work. There is still some variability in the quality of the advice given; some is too vague.

The leadership of teaching is stronger because you have appointed a senior leader from within the school to work alongside the assistant headteacher with that responsibility. This is a new appointment, but improvements were already evident in the quality of teaching, particularly in English. The procedures for feeding back after lesson observations that are based on 'what went well' and 'even better if' are helping teachers to discuss their practice in a helpful developmental way. In English, progress has accelerated and attainment is rising. In the sixth form, the improving picture of the past two years is continuing.

The professional development programme is having a positive impact on teaching. For example, a recent session on questioning has taken place. In the lessons I observed, teachers were using a creative range of techniques to conduct question and answer sessions. Teachers structure their lessons well and share resources with one another, which is increasing the consistency in the quality of teaching. They use the data and detailed information on the individual students in their classes well to plan activities that will promote good learning. Sometimes they fail to put the strategies they have planned into action. Recently appointed student leaders will give you useful additional evidence of the quality of teaching over time. Feedback from students highlights the on-going variability in the quality of teaching and, helpfully, pinpoints aspects that need improving.

The school gives good personal support to all students. As a result, attendance is higher and exclusions reduced. You have enhanced the support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and for those who are eligible for the Pupil Premium funding. You have provided additional training for teaching assistants and teachers and attached teaching assistants to subject areas. This is starting to promote better progress for these groups but they still make less progress than others. Mentors are available for more able students and you have raised the level of challenge in their targets. In many lessons, teachers are providing interesting and challenging additional work.

You are expecting more of subject leaders in relation to their accountability for the quality of teaching. To support this you have increased the regularity and rigour of line management meetings. Challenge and support at all levels are improving. You have shared the analysis of the audit you undertook of staff skills with subject leaders. This is forming the basis for departmental professional development. The introduction of non-negotiable features of teachers' work is helping subject leaders to challenge their teams.

Governors have improved their understanding of data, supported by training. An external review has taken place and an action plan devised. This plan has not yet been finalised, but the school's action plan is a good model, having the majority of the features seen in effective plans.

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

You have established productive links with a number of partners, including Challenge Partners, The PiXL Club and teaching schools alliances in Luton and Central Bedfordshire local authority. The local authority is providing appropriate support by commissioning jointly with the school the work of an independent school improvement partner and providing access to free places on the Improving and Outstanding Teacher Programmes.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector