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Mr Steve Mercer
Headteacher
St Andrew's CofE High School for Boys
Sackville Road
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Dear Mr Mercer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Andrew's CofE High School for Boys

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 third 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- moderate teachers' assessments and develop a clear understanding of what good teaching looks like and how to promote it
- link with a similar school judged to be good or better by Ofsted at its most recent inspection so that senior leaders, including the headteacher can learn rapidly from most effective practice in raising achievement
- revise the school development plan so that the points for improvement from the section 5 inspection which judged the school to require improvement are recognisable and there is clarity about who will be accountable for implementing and monitoring each aspect of it.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the governing body and representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the most recent version of the school improvement plan, alongside other documentation, such as records of lesson observations and monitoring of marking and feedback. You and your deputy headteacher accompanied me on an extended visit to lessons across a range of subjects. This enabled me to talk to students and look at their work. During visits to lessons, I took the opportunity to gauge the pace of learning and the level of challenge provided through teachers' learning objectives. I also looked at the quality of teachers' feedback to students through their marking.

Main findings

At the time of the previous monitoring visit in July 2013 leaders had begun to tackle effectively the following weaknesses:

- teachers' use of assessment information and
- teachers' planning of their lessons
- teachers' marking of boys' work
- the need for all teachers to focus on improving boys' literacy skills.

Since September, they have also begun to address weaknesses in subject leadership. For example, a new leader has been appointed for information communication technology and there is now a temporary new leader of English. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of these appointments.

Leaders at all levels observe teaching often. They provide weaker teachers with six weekly support programmes based around appropriate targets for improvement. However, despite an extensive range of monitoring activity, senior leaders are unable to present an accurate overview of the current quality of teaching. This is because they have an over-generous view of current achievement and the quality of teaching and marking.

Despite the recommendation for further action from my visit in July, senior leaders have resisted forging the necessary and appropriate links offered to them by the local authority with a similar school, judged to be good. To date, the only links pursued have been with a Subject Leader Expert [SLE] in English of a nearby local school. However, no verification of teachers' assessments of Key Stage 4 English has taken place.

Discussions with leaders and scrutiny of current data relating to GCSE predictions demonstrated that despite the introduction of a useful system for collecting teachers' assessment information and checking student's progress against their targets,

leaders rightly have no confidence in the accuracy the information gathered. Despite this, little attempt has been made to secure greater certainty by addressing the very clear mandate contained within the May 2013 inspection report to secure external verification of teachers' assessments when necessary. This is unhelpful in driving improvement, particularly in the core subjects of English, science and mathematics.

The headteacher has identified a target of October 2014 for re-inspection by Ofsted with a judgement of good. This aspiration has been shared with governors and senior leaders alike. However, in the light of the slippage in relation to actions yet to be taken and the level of challenge faced by leaders, it is unlikely that the target will be met. Furthermore, discussions with senior leaders revealed that there is disagreement within the senior team as to whether this target is realistic. Such disharmony within the senior team is not helpful to the school.

During this visit, a number of lessons across a range of subjects yielded evidence of teachers fully implementing policies newly introduced since the previous inspection. For example, the new marking policy which requires teachers to evidence what students' did well [WWW] and what could have worked even better [EBI]. Boys with whom I spoke, felt that the new policy was helpful, however some were unable to specify what they need to work on to improve, beyond working harder. This is because the points for improvement are not always specific enough. Similarly, although teachers are now planning lessons in accordance with the new policy, learning objectives are often too broad to ensure an appropriate degree of challenge for students at all levels. In particular, the level of challenge for the most able students in the groups visited is often insufficient.

Governors have now undergone an external review of their practice. The Chair of governors has also initiated his own self-review with the help of a tool provided by the National College for Teaching and Leadership. Outcomes of this initial self-review have contributed to the subsequent external review and governors are properly clear about the next steps including a re-structure to strengthen aspects of their monitoring function.

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

Local authority representatives visit the school often and officers have clearly been involved in helpful scrutiny of leadership monitoring activity. However, the headteacher has had too much licence to reject opportunities to develop effectively the leadership capacity within the school. Local authority notes of visit are comprehensive and provide clear evidence of effective challenge in relation to leadership activity. However, they do not show that the headteacher has been

challenged in relation to actions not taken, in particular the failure to link with a good school or verify teachers' assessments.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex and the Diocese of Chichester.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector