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Dai Meredith
Perryfields High School Specialist Maths and Computing College
Oldacre Road
Oldbury
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Dear Mr Meredith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Perryfields High School Specialist Maths and Computing College

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 December 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.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, a group of subject leaders, groups of students from each key stage, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plan and recent subject-specific action plans were evaluated. Current school monitoring data on pupils' progress was scrutinised. The minutes of Governing Body meetings were considered. I accompanied you on a walk around the school, during which time we made brief visits to a number of lessons.

Main findings

You and your leadership team have taken prompt and highly effective action to address the areas for improvement identified in the recent section 5 report.

The system for monitoring and tracking students' progress has undergone radical change. The new system provides a whole school perspective about students' progress that is simple, sharp and highly effective as a tool for identifying underperformance. As a result of this, staff at all levels in the school – senior leaders, subject and pastoral leaders, teachers and teaching assistants, now have access to accurate, up-to-date and clear data on pupils' performance. Quality assurance processes to check the quality of teaching and learning are now rigorous and involve a schedule of regular activities that involve subject and senior leaders working together.

These changes have improved the accountability of all staff and allowed clearer performance management targets to be set that are linked closely to students' progress. As a result, senior leaders can monitor the performance of the subject areas they manage more effectively. Appropriate and well-focused training and development for subject and pastoral leaders ensures they understand and are confident in their use of the new systems. Discussions with subject leaders suggest they value highly the improved quality of data they have access to. As one middle leader suggested, the system allows them to see 'the bigger picture' and to be very clear about their role in contributing to school improvement - in terms of raising the quality of teaching and improving the progress students make in their specialist areas of responsibility.

Teachers have received training in the effective use of data. This, and well-directed professional development, is enabling them to provide more appropriate learning activities that challenge students of all abilities. Students comment on the fact that teachers have begun to check their understanding in lessons more often and that they are being set tasks that match their particular abilities more closely.

Underperformance in relation to students' progress is now identified more quickly and appropriate interventions are introduced promptly. In addition, the system allows for more coherence in the way that pastoral and academic interventions are introduced. Underperformance in relation to teaching is also identified more quickly, allowing timely and appropriate support and development to be introduced. Improvements in the quality of teaching and in students' progress are already evident. School data on students' progress and their predicted attainment suggest a significant improvement on the summer 2013 results, both overall and for all individual groups of pupils. Attendance continues to improve.

There has been a strong focus on improving the quality of marking and assessment. While further work is still needed to ensure improvements are fully embedded, students commented positively that, in many subjects, their books are now marked more regularly and feedback comments tell them precisely what aspects of their work need to improve and what they need to do to reach the next level.

More revision and out-of-school support sessions have been introduced and students are encouraged to attend these for a range of subjects, not just for English and

mathematics. Students are very positive about these and about the support they receive in general from staff.

The use of level 3 value-added data to monitor and evaluate the progress of students in the sixth form has replaced the previous system. Appropriate staff training means there is now a clear focus on developing the study skills of sixth form students to enable them to improve their performance at AS and A level. Students comment on the fact they are aware of this change in focus and feel it is helping them to be more confident and to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Members of the Governing Body have a sound understanding of school performance data and are actively engaged in setting priorities and monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions. Regular training and a proactive approach to their own development ensure governors are able to support and challenge school leaders well.

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 provides appropriate support for the school. This is supplemented by the many links with other schools that you have developed over recent years. The development of further links with high performing schools would provide opportunities for staff in all subject departments to become familiar with what outstanding performance and provision looks like.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Sandwell local authority name and the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

Yours sincerely

Gwendoline Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector