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Mr Neil Morrison
Headteacher
Hexham Middle School
Wanless Lane
Hexham
Northumberland
NE46 1BU

Dear Mr Morrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hexham Middle School, Northumberland

Following my visit to your school on 3 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 January 2014. 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:

- ensure that middle leaders have more opportunities to play a robust and consistent part in monitoring and evaluating the work in the key areas which require improvement
- ensure that governors have the skills needed to fully challenge the school leadership
- streamline the school's action plan so that milestones are clearly set out and the intended impact of actions is clear
- ensure that the recently introduced assessment processes are used across the whole school to improve the quality of lesson planning and raise teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities
- provide updated information to parents and carers about the progress that is being made in tackling the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report.

Evidence

During this monitoring visit I met with you and other senior and middle leaders, a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and with a group of pupils from Years 6 and 7. I also met with two student teachers from Northumbria University who are on their final placement at your school. I evaluated the school's action plan and I read a range of documents including minutes from recent governors' steering group meetings. I also visited classrooms and spoke with pupils about their work.

Context

Since the recent inspection a new executive headteacher has been appointed. He will take up post in September 2014.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and his team have moved effectively to tackle the issues identified by the recent section 5 inspection particularly in relation to teaching and leadership. A detailed post inspection plan has been drawn up. This specifically identifies how the school will respond to the improvement areas identified in the inspection report. Although the plan is not specific enough about how the impact of actions will be measured, it identifies what needs to be done and the staff and governors are clear about their roles. Since the inspection action has been taken to increase the opportunities pupils have to write at length. Pupils report that they have noticed this not only in English but across the school. They also report that their work is regularly marked and increasingly helps them see what they need to do to improve.

Senior leaders have given middle leaders clear direction to improve their classroom monitoring and assessment skills. Consequently their expectations of what teachers should do are higher and they are increasingly able to make robust judgements about the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. These actions must continue and focus on ensuring that teachers and other adults work effectively with pupils across the school so that they all make at least good progress.

The governors' steering group meets regularly and is starting to assess the impact of the school's actions as it improves. Governors are now more knowledgeable about the school's performance and are better able to make informed judgements about the progress being made. Nonetheless further development is still required. The governing body must draw on a wider range of sources so that it is not solely reliant on information provided by senior leaders as it makes its judgements about the school's performance.

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 now providing effective support to the governors' steering group. It is helping governors identify a range of ways through which they can assess the progress of the school. The school is also receiving detailed and effective support, particularly in the improvement of teaching and the assessment of pupils' work, from staff at Queen Elizabeth High School.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector