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Bryn Thomas
Wolverley CofE Secondary School
Blakeshall Lane
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Kidderminster
DY11 5XQ

Dear Mr Thomas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wolverley CofE Secondary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 May 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 February 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 actions identified in the school's improvement plan have specific milestones so that governors are able to monitor the school's progress accurately and effectively
- ensure that monitoring activities are specified by date and type
- strengthen the focus on the achievement of students eligible for pupil premium (pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, students from service families and those students looked after by the local authority)
- ensure that information about progress made by Key Stage 3 students is shared regularly with governors.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, the head of sixth form, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A number of short visits were made to lessons and a range of information provided by the school was considered. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

At the last inspection an acting headteacher and acting deputy were in place which remained the case until Easter when you joined the school as headteacher. Since then there has been an internal appointment to the senior leadership team.

Main findings

Although you have officially been in post for a very short time, you and the acting headteacher have worked closely and effectively together since January. As a result, effective actions have been taken so that improvement is building pace. School leaders and governors, although disappointed by the judgement made at the last inspection, have used the outcome to 'kick start' a comprehensive programme for improvement, some of which began before the inspection when the acting headteacher was appointed.

The school's improvement plan identifies priorities accurately. You have integrated the areas for improvement from the inspection into the wider school improvement plan very effectively. Actions are appropriately timed across a 12 month period. However, you now need to specify when monitoring of these will take place and how this will be done. Success criteria are in place, but these need to be supplemented with clear and regular milestones so that governors are able to monitor the school's progress over a period of time. The role of governors in monitoring progress should be reflected in the plan.

You have re-structured the leadership team for September, so that it more accurately reflects the size and ethos of the school. Roles and responsibilities have been allocated according to strengths and matched closely to the school's priorities. This supports robust quality assurance of the school's work. A further re-structure of the work of teaching assistants will be undertaken this term with a view to improving their impact on student achievement.

A new whole school marking policy has been put in place. Although this is very new, early indications from quality assurance activities suggest that this is being consistently applied by all teachers. Students spoken to during the visit said that they liked the new system and felt that it gave them more information about how they could improve their work.

The school has identified suitable opportunities for teaching staff to share and develop good practice. For instance, through the use of open door weeks when teachers identified as having particularly good skills in a focus area, invite others to observe their teaching. These are scheduled to occur throughout the school year. Good practice is also shared through subject leaders delivering training at twilight sessions and through support from a local teaching school with which you have made effective links to support further improvement.

The new quality assurance programme has been well-received by staff and links closely with performance management, so that staff are very clear about their responsibilities to meet targets. Training has been provided for middle leaders so that they are more fully and consistently involved in the process. A strength of the programme is the published 'follow up' quality assurance calendar that shows exactly what steps will be taken by senior leaders following any quality assurance activity.

The school's own data suggests that progress and attainment overall is beginning to improve. However, the gap between students in receipt of pupil premium and others remains very wide and there is little sign of a reduction. Currently, not enough specific focus is given to this group in the improvement plan and this situation needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The school has identified this as an issue and has already commissioned a review of pupil premium use and impact by a National Leader of Education (NLE).

Attendance in the sixth form is beginning to improve in lessons, although the school is aware that further improvement is required. You have re-organised the learning timetable for these students to support this. Due to low sixth form numbers you have forged a partnership with a local school for joint provision which will enable you to maintain the broad curriculum offer currently available. This will come into force in September.

The governing body has been very proactive in identifying ways in which they can improve their own performance in order to better support and challenge the school. They have undertaken a skills audit and commissioned a review of their effectiveness. They are clear about the areas that need further development and have already taken steps to achieve this. For instance, they have re-organised their committee structure to match with senior leaders' roles and responsibilities. Governors are very confident in the new leadership structure and report that they are a more integral part of the school's programme for improvement than has been the case in the past. They say that they feel much more confident about questioning and challenging school leaders because of the quality of information they are provided with and because leaders are keen to be challenged.

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 provided appropriate support over a period of time before and since the recent inspection. This includes regular visits and reviews by the school improvement adviser to monitor progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector