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Julie Rudge
Headteacher
Thomas Alleyne's High School
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Uttoxeter
ST14 8DU

Dear Mrs Rudge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas Alleyne's High School

Following my visit to your school on 6 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:

- Make sure, as a matter of urgency, that assessments made by teachers in English are reliable by carrying out an external verification of attainment judgements
- Amend the school's action plans to:
 - reduce key actions into interim steps, linked to measurable targets that must be met along the way to becoming a good school
 - increasing the level of accountability through identifying key staff who will be responsible for leading on, and delivering, particular actions
 - sharpen the timescales for monitoring to make sure this is rigorous and frequent

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders in the school, and a group of four subject leaders. I also met with a group of four governors which included the Chair of the Governing Body. A further meeting was held with a representative from the local authority and a national leader of education from a local outstanding school which is providing support for the school. In all these meetings we discussed the action taken since the last inspection. A series of short visits to English lessons in Years 10 and 11 were carried out to determine any early signs of impact on students' learning of the school's steps taken to improve the quality of teaching. The school's action plan was also evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection, the most significant change has been your own appointment. At the time of my visit, you have been in post for six days. You are in the process of appointing a new subject leader for English, along with additional teaching posts in the department. A further change in role has been in organising a senior leader to have specific responsibility for monitoring the students who are eligible for support through pupil premium funding.

Main findings

Governors and interim leaders of the school have not wasted any time in taking action to address the areas for improvement which were identified in the inspection. You had a significant input in writing the school's action plan, before formally starting in your new post. This plan now needs a further refinement so that governors are in a stronger position to monitor the progress being made with the key actions identified, and to be able to ask challenging questions where progress does not happen at a fast enough pace or with sufficient impact.

A review of the school's indicators for attainment and progress in 2014 presents a very positive picture for 2014. However, there are still concerns over the reliability of this information, especially in English, as steps have not yet been taken to secure greater confidence in this data. An external verification of teacher assessments should therefore take place with urgency.

The most noticeable improvement since the inspection is evident in the quality of marking and feedback to students. Senior leader monitoring of books shows that marking occurs frequently and students receive detailed information on their strengths and what they need to do next. Students follow this advice and, as a result, are improving the quality of their work. Where senior leaders identify there are weaknesses in marking, teachers are set clear targets to improve their practice and are given support to help them to meet these targets. This includes working with a colleague who has strengths in this particular area. Effective action is being

taken to improve consistency in marking across the school. Further monitoring by senior and subject leaders is ensuring that improvements in marking continue.

School leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching has been improved and now includes a review of assessment information for a class, together with a consideration of the views of students on their experience of teaching. This is providing more information on the key strengths of teaching in the school and where further improvements are needed.

There has been a renewed focus on the use of assessment information to identify where further support for students may be required, and this is happening at a faster pace than before the inspection. Student support leaders now have a better understanding of the progress students should be making as a result of senior leader support and training in this area.

School leaders have carried out their own review of the use of pupil premium funding to find out if the best use is being made of this funding. Alternative ways to use the funding have been identified in looking at what is working well in other schools. Steps taken are already making a difference. This is seen in a reduction in the number of these students who are persistently absent and also in improving the overall attendance of this group. Close monitoring of the progress being made by these students is leading to rapid identification of students who are not making the progress they should. These students are then supported through 'booster classes' which can be tailored to address individual students' weaknesses.

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 commissioned support through a local teaching school. The school is making effective use of this support through a national leader of education. A range of support is currently planned which includes training for outstanding practitioners to enable them to develop teaching further in this school.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector