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Mr Glenn Smith
Honiton Community College
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Honiton
EX14 1QT

Dear Mr Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Honiton Community College

Following my visit to your school on 8 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:

- Incorporate into the post Ofsted action plan the subjects requiring immediate action to improve students' achievements.
- Identify precisely in the school action plan the aspects of learning and teaching identified by the recent review. Record how impact of the action will be measured.
- Ensure subject leaders' plans focus on those aspects of teaching that need to improve to ensure all departmental teaching is at least good.
- Ensure the training of subject leaders enables them to drive forward improvement in teaching and learning by accessing high quality educational research and Ofsted's subject and survey reports.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and three members of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's post Ofsted action plan, subject department action plans and documents relating to these plans. We carried out a visit to four lessons.

Main findings

Your post Ofsted action plan identifies the most important areas to tackle in order to bring about greater consistency in teaching quality, accelerate learning and strengthen the capacity of subject leaders to make change happen. A greater understanding of students' previous attainment, their current achievement and how this compares to national progress measures is being used well to raise expectations of what students can achieve. The action plan is strong on identifying progress measures. There is a clear focus on reducing the gaps between students receiving pupil premium funding and others. It is positive that the systems for securing the accuracy of teacher assessments have been strengthened. Consequently, you now have more reliable and credible information about the progress that pupils are making.

You have identified that the action plan's objectives to improve teaching do not give enough detail about which aspects of teaching need to improve. At the same time, the plan does not identify the subjects where students do less well. While showing strength in the use of information about the progress that pupils are making, particularly for Year 10 and Year 11 students, it is less secure about those aspects of teaching that need to improve. This means monitoring and accountability by the executive team is less focussed than it should be. The individual subject action plans reflect a similar picture to that found at whole school level. Subject leaders have tended to apply whole school objectives for teaching without clearly identifying what is holding back teaching from being consistently good in their department. Subject leaders do not yet make enough use of educational research and Ofsted subject survey reports to complement their work in this area. However, a wide-ranging review of learning and teaching has identified much more precisely what areas of development are now required and you are currently developing a system to better judge the success of each action.

The plans and action to strengthen subject leadership have moved forward at a good pace. Pairing an effective leader with two or three other subject leaders is helping ensuring best practice is shared in their day-to-day work. Subject leaders are now better held to account for their performance and that of the students. They are more involved in reviewing performance through 'book looks' and lesson observations. While this work is being led well it is not always clear what action is to be taken following each monitoring activity. The newly developed guidance offered in the middle leader handbook should prove helpful in this respect.

The use of additional mentoring and coaching support for teachers has begun positively. The focus on effective marking and ways to improve teacher led discussions is helping bring staff together to reflect on their practice. Less than good teaching is challenged appropriately and there is an adequate range of support provided through staff training programmes.

Governors are playing their part and challenging senior leaders more precisely about the quality of education. In our discussion they demonstrated their good knowledge and understanding of how senior leaders are measuring the school's current performance. They are anxious that they too can measure the success of improving teaching more robustly.

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

There is a helpful partnership with the Jurassic Coast Teaching alliance. The visits by the assistant headteacher of the Woodruffe School and secondary leader of education provide expertise in carrying out quality assurance of teaching and learning in the mathematics department. These skills are being effectively transferred to other leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector