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Mrs Wendy Conaghan
Headteacher
Kingsdown School
Hyde Road
Swindon
SN2 7SH

Dear Mrs Conaghan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kingsdown School

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 July 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:

- include measurable short-term targets within improvement plans to regularly check on the progress the school is making.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. There were also a number of short visits to lessons to consider students' attitudes to learning and the quality of feedback and marking. The school improvement plan was evaluated. School documentation relating to students' achievement was scrutinised.

Context

There have been no staffing changes at senior level since the previous inspection. A new faculty leader for mathematics took up post September. The Governing Body currently has an interim Chair in place until January 2015, when the substantive Chair takes up post.

Main findings

You communicate a clear determination to bring about the necessary improvements at the school to enable it to become a good school as quickly as possible. Senior leaders, middle leaders and staff share this drive for improvement. Staff understand, and accept, the raised expectations placed on them. A positive and supportive atmosphere is evident across the school.

The main priority is to improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently at least good. Timely training has been provided for staff on key aspects of teaching including marking and feedback, questioning, and planning to ensure all students are suitably challenged. This training has been led by the most effective practitioners. The school recognises their expertise and fully utilises it to develop others.

A new marking policy has been implemented. This requires teachers to provide students with more detailed feedback on what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their learning further. Students now routinely respond to this marking to demonstrate their understanding of how to improve their work. Books show that all staff are now applying the new policy and that it is having a positive effect.

Subject leaders are now following a planned monitoring cycle which requires them to evaluate the performance of their departments and to report this to senior leaders. Through these activities, senior leaders are more robustly holding faculty leaders to account for the quality of teaching, students' achievement and the standard of marking within their departments.

Subject leaders ensure that information on students' achievement is being carefully considered by teachers to plan activities which sufficiently challenge them, whatever their ability, to achieve well. They are developing the quality of teachers' questioning so that it is being used more effectively to assess students' understanding and to probe and deepen their learning further. Monitoring records indicate that this focused training is beginning to improve the quality of teaching.

Teachers now work to more challenging targets, linked directly to students' progress, further raising expectations. The 2014 GCSE examination results demonstrate that students are making better progress in most subjects than before. Students achieve well in English. However, their achievement in mathematics is not yet good. I will return to the school to share the key findings from the Ofsted Better

Mathematics materials to ensure the mathematics teachers understand, and learn from, the best practice that exists across the country.

The Governing Body share your determination for the school to improve quickly. They have a much clearer understanding of the strengths of the school and areas that are in need of further improvement. The school improvement plan identifies the key priorities and actions that will enable the school to become at least good. There are not, though, measurable short-term targets to enable governors to regularly monitor the progress the school is making.

External support

You are drawing on a range of helpful support. A school improvement advisor provides timely support and challenge. Teachers are accessing useful support from local schools to develop their teaching and subjects. Swindon local authority effectively supports governors through regular updates on key educational issues and training to ensure that they have a clearer understanding of students' achievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector