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Clare Ellis
Co-Principal
Teesdale School
Prospect Place
Barnard Castle
County Durham
DL12 8HH

Dear Ms Ellis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Teesdale School, Durham

Following my visit to your academy on 8 May 2015, 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 academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2015. 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 academy should take further action to:

- Further develop the expertise of governors so that they are more able to hold leaders to account for the progress that the academy is making. Governors should continue to extend the range of evidence they use to make their judgements about the academy so that they are not over reliant on the information they receive from the middle and senior leadership teams.
- Further develop the expertise of middle leaders so that they are more able to hold their teams to account for the quality of teaching, marking and assessment.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with the senior leadership team and five members of the governing body, including the Chair and Vice Chair. I also met with subject leaders and a group of Year 9 students. Several documents were scrutinised including the academy's action plan and governor meeting minutes. I also visited a range of classrooms and spoke with students about their learning.

Main findings

Governors and senior leaders are taking the right steps to tackle the weaknesses identified in the inspection report. The improvement plan provides clear strategic direction and contains appropriate benchmarks to check on progress. However, the plan does not identify clearly who is responsible for each action and who is responsible for assessing the impact of these actions.

Leaders are moving promptly to address weaknesses in mathematics teaching. They are providing focused support to improve the quality of teaching and are carefully monitoring its impact on students' learning. Students report that they have noticed improvements. They particularly welcome the more regular assessment they receive and the opportunities they have to attend 'catch up' sessions. However, staff do not always ensure that they have the highest expectations of all the students they teach.

When judging the quality of teaching senior leaders are now drawing on a wider range of evidence rather than relying solely on what they see in classrooms. This wider evidence includes more regular and detailed review of students' work books and folders, now increasingly done jointly with middle leaders. Greater attention is also being paid to what students say about their work and their experiences in the academy. Both senior and middle leaders are using these insights and assessments to ensure that staff are more carefully held to account. Staff training now focuses more precisely on improving the quality of teaching and the feedback they provide for students about their work. However, there is still inconsistency in the quality of the feedback students receive from their teachers. More needs to be done to improve the quality of feedback so that students in all subjects are clear what they need to do to improve their work.

Senior leaders are now ensuring that the academy's capacity to track students' progress across subjects is more rigorous. This is due to more regular and more insightful analysis of data. Senior and middle leaders now meet regularly to analyse this data and other information about students. This helps them to identify 'gaps' in students' performance and to work with subject staff to move swiftly to address them. While the introduction of this more rigorous approach is recent, it offers a potentially powerful tool to search out underachievement, identify weaknesses and focus on the learning of individual students.

Governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the weaknesses identified in the inspection report and are acting effectively to address them. Senior and middle leaders help governors in their work by providing up to date information about the progress of the academy. This is underpinning governors' capacity to challenge academy staff about students' performance and progress against the priorities in the academy's action plan. The introduction of a governors' committee to specifically monitor the impact of the academy's post Ofsted plan is giving governors keen insights in to what needs to be done and which actions are having a positive impact on learning. However, governors rely on a fairly narrow range of sources from which they draw their evidence about the academy's progress and as a result they cannot be fully confident that the information they receive is accurate.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy is receiving effective support from Durham Education Development Services. As well as supporting the improvement of mathematics teaching, Durham EDS is working with senior and middle leaders in a review of the Key Stage 3 curriculum as part of the academy's bid to raise teachers' expectations of what students can achieve. The academy has also recently further developed its link with Carmel College, a local outstanding school, to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Durham and as below.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The Education Funding Agency (EFA): hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- For academies: CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk