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18 May 2015

Ms Alex Newton
Principal
Westlands School
Westlands Lane
Torquay
TQ1 3PE

Dear Ms Newton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Westlands School

Following my visit to your school on 18 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 school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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 school should take further action to:

- ensure that achievement targets set for disadvantaged students relate to them making at least good progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the Principal, other senior leaders and members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I held a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority and made short visits to lessons to determine the standard of students' work and the quality of teachers' marking and feedback. I also evaluated the school action plan.

Context

A National Leader of Governance took up the position of Chair of the Governing Body in January 2015. New heads of English and mathematics have been appointed for September 2015. The school is in the process of exploring the possibility of becoming an academy school sponsored by the Ivybridge Academy Trust.

Main findings

The school has continued to improve since the last inspection, when it was judged no longer to require special measures. The Principal and other senior leaders communicate a strong determination and drive to ensure that the school becomes at least good as quickly as possible. Leaders have raised expectations of the quality of teaching and of what students are able to achieve across the school.

Through more regular, focused visits to lessons, leaders have gained a clearer and more accurate understanding of the quality of teaching. Senior leaders have been highly effective in coaching middle leaders, to improve the quality and accuracy of their evaluation of teaching. Middle leaders are now more accountable for the quality of teaching within their departments. Leaders are working effectively alongside Ivybridge Community College to improve the quality of teaching at the school and, in particular, to develop outstanding practice.

Teachers are now consistently following the school's marking policy. As a result, students receive more frequent feedback on what they have done well and how they can improve their learning further. Occasionally, however, some feedback from teachers is not specific enough in the guidance provided to students.

Senior leaders are now setting more challenging targets, which set higher expectations of students' progress than in the past. However, the targets set for disadvantaged students are less ambitious, because they are aimed at closing the gap between their achievement and their peers'. This does not necessarily equate to good progress for this group of students. The information the school has on students' current achievement indicates that they are now making much better progress across most subjects and year groups. The work seen in books indicates that this is the case particularly in mathematics.

Since his arrival, the Chair of Governors has implemented a more rigorous approach by governors to monitoring the quality of education provided by the school. Governors have a much clearer cycle of monitoring activities and, once completed, they report the finding to all governors. This is increasing governors' understanding of all aspects of the schools work. Following an external review of governance, governors have implemented a 'recovery plan' to ensure that all aspects of their work, particularly the challenge they provide to leaders, is more effective. This plan covers the key responsibilities of governors and, if it is implemented in full, will ensure that governors work more effectively.

External support

The school accesses effective external support from a school improvement advisor (SIA) and from Ivybridge Community College. The SIA supports the school well through the close monitoring and quality assurance of leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Teachers regularly visit Ivybridge Community College to observe, and learn from, effective teaching.

Until recently, the local authority has not provided sufficient support to the school. Now, however, they have provided an advisor who is providing effective support to develop the quality of middle leadership and governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector