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27 June 2015

Mr Mark Jones
Acting Headteacher
Talbot House School
Hexham Road
Walbottle
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
NE15 8HW

Dear Mr Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Talbot House School, Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Following my visit to your school on 26 June 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 and your colleagues 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. At its previous section 5 inspection in March of this year, the school was judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, governors and the Talbot House Trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- develop the whole-school curriculum by:
 - ensuring a broad and balanced curricular entitlement for all students
 - creating and implementing a robust and moderated system of regular student assessment across all subjects taught
- make further improvements to the school development plan by:
 - regularly updating it to include any recent evaluation of the school's work by external partners or governors
 - making more explicit reference to the improvements areas from the previous inspection

- including clearer milestones to aid the on-going assessment of progress of all priorities and actions over the life of the plan
- ensuring targets and success measures include improved outcomes for all students.

Evidence

During this inspection I met with you and another senior leader, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and a local authority officer who has been commissioned to work as a school improvement partner (SIP) with the school. I read, evidenced and evaluated the school development plan, and joined you on a walk round the school when I spoke informally to a small number of staff and students.

Context

Since the previous inspection, two primary teachers have left the school and two members of the pastoral support team have retired. The school has recruited two primary teachers, an English specialist, a Key Stage 3/4 teaching assistant, three primary teaching assistants, and a pastoral support member of staff on full-time contracts. Part-time teachers for physical education, design and technology and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) have also joined the school.

Main findings

The Talbot House Trust's appointment of you, as a seconded acting headteacher, prior to the recent inspection, has been crucial in helping to tackle identified weaknesses in provision. However, the Trust now recognises the urgency of appointing a full-time headteacher to ensure the long-term development of senior leadership in the school, and is currently going through a second advert with the intention of a September start for a new appointee. There is a clear and sensible exit and fall-back strategy for whether or not an appointment is made. In either case, your agreement to maintain on-going contact with the school into the foreseeable future should ensure a smooth transition in senior leadership of the school.

The Trust has recently formed a properly constituted sixteen person governing body. Although there are three vacancies, there is a good range of experienced members now in post, including the Chair of the Talbot House Trust, a headteacher from a successful special school in a neighbouring local authority as Vice Chair, some senior staff and local businessmen. There is also a parent of a former student of the school, but the Chair and Vice Chair recognise that the governing body needs better representation from existing parents/carers. Governors are keen to develop their role, so the Trust/governing body has acted promptly to buy into a service level agreement for governor services with the local authority to ensure access to targeted support and training. The monitoring and evaluation role of governors is developing slowly, but already the Chair has undertaken a number of focused visits

to the school, and produced written notes outlining the purpose and outcome of these for senior leaders and other governors.

Once in post, you quickly carried out an initial review of the school's curricular provision, and you have identified several weaknesses which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. However, there are still areas which need further work. For example, achieving curricular breadth and balance across all parts of the school, and ensuring that assessment procedures and student data are thoroughly moderated across all subjects taught. Your work in developing a detailed school development plan, in five parts, is helping to provide a shared focus for the school's future work. This plan provides a clear overview of key priorities and actions in students' achievement, teaching, behaviour and leadership and management. The separate literacy and numeracy plans, together with a separate Key Stage 2 and skills centre plan are comprehensive in content. However, there are some aspects of this collective plan, which limit its usefulness as a statement of vision and future direction for the school. There is a lack of clarity in referencing the improvement areas from the recent inspection report. This makes it difficult for senior leaders and governors to accurately assess the on-going progress being made in all these areas, as exemplified during this visit. There is a lack of clear milestones (shorter time intervals) to aid the on-going assessment of the school's progress over the life of the plan. This limits, also, the potential to align the collection of this on-going and regularly updated progress information with key governing body meetings, so that governors can fulfil a more robust challenge and support role with senior leaders. Some targets and success measures do not identify, sufficiently clearly, what improvements are being sought in provision, especially in students' progress and achievement during their time at the school.

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

Senior leaders and the newly formed governing body are making very good use of external support. For example, the commissioned support from a special school headteacher from neighbouring local authority is adding increasing capacity to both senior leadership and the governance of the school. The purchasing of a local authority service level agreement for a SIP, to link with the senior leaders and governors, also adds further to the capacity of the school to bring about the necessary improvements.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body/Chair of Talbot House Trust.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector