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Mr Desi McKeown
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr McKeown

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Deanes School

Following my visit to your school on 13 October 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 June 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, students, the chair and members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Your school improvement plan was evaluated. We made short visits together to seven lessons and I visited the new behaviour centre. I considered various documents such as the school's monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and your school's self-evaluation.

Context

There were several staff changes over the summer. A new Chair of the Governing Body was elected last week. The senior leadership team remains in place.

Main findings

At the time of the previous inspection, you had very recently become the acting headteacher and it was too soon to see the impact of new ways of working. Recent improvements are now beginning to have a positive impact. For example, Year 11 students were very clear that there is a 'different vibe around the school'. They spoke about better behaviour because of 'clearer boundaries' and stricter rules being enforced with, for example, 'detention being taken more seriously'. The culture of the school has improved recently. Again, students picked out 'more visible teachers' around the school as part of the explanation and praised the approachability of both you and the senior leadership team. Additionally, they were very positive and appreciative about the mandatory revision classes introduced from September. They were confident that these classes were helping them to better understand the subjects in which they needed extra help.

Upon your appointment as acting headteacher, you acted quickly to tackle ineffective teaching. As a result, several teachers identified as a cause for concern left the school in the summer. Challenge to underperformance in the classroom remains a high priority for you. The recent whole-school monitoring exercise by the senior leadership team confirms that, although there has been some improvement, too much teaching remains less than good. Alongside staff changes, you have given all staff clear instructions regarding your expectations for student progress. The whole-school policy on marking and assessment has been implemented inconsistently across subjects. Teachers in need of additional support have been identified and support plans put in place.

An issue identified in each of the last two inspection reports has been to consider whether the length of lessons was appropriate to the needs and abilities of current students. The new leadership team has grasped the nettle and introduced shorter lessons from September. This was welcomed by students, who reported that they get as much learning in 75 minutes now as they previously did in 100.

The school continues to drive up attendance towards the national average. Attendance has improved, but leaders are aware of the need for further action. One of the reasons for the improvement has been the introduction of internal sanctions to address poor behaviour rather than resorting to fixed-term exclusions. Leaders have correctly analysed attendance patterns amongst different groups and have taken a more robust approach to authorising absence.

There is a very new Chair of the Governing Body, who is a national leader of governance. His expertise and experience is making a positive impact. Through his previous work as vice-chair, governors are now more proficient in monitoring aspects of the school, including their allocated subjects or areas of responsibility.

You and senior leaders are operating as a cohesive unit and it is clear that you are now getting things done that you have known needed doing for some time. As a team, you are very focused on the school's key priorities. You seek examples of good practice in other schools. You recognise that outcomes for students continued to decline this year, although the progress of students from their starting points improved. Some subjects remain particularly weak and you are rightly tackling this. You have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and understand what needs to be done to improve the education of students. Your improvement plan is appropriate to achieve this, but these actions need to take place with urgency.

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

You and senior leaders have worked with the local authority to find solutions to the lack of expertise in some areas of the school. For instance, through visits to schools that have successfully improved the achievement of students supported through the pupil premium and schools where attendance has improved. Your school is working more closely with the local authority to support the tackling of poor attendance and assistance with the many issues related to human resources. Governors, senior leaders and the local authority together need to agree a strategy for the permanent leadership of the school. Given the new roles in the governing body, I recommend an external review of the school's governance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and to the Director of Children's Services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector