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Stephen Tong
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Dear Mr Tong

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Poltair School

Following my visit to your school on 26 May 2016, 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 November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The school was also judged to require improvement at its section 5 inspection in November 2013.

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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that leaders, when evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, continue to focus relentlessly on the impact that teaching has on pupils' progress over time
- make certain that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, especially boys, continues to improve in order to close the gap between these pupils and others with the same starting points.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority by telephone. The school improvement plan was also examined. I visited lessons in the company of senior leaders and took the opportunity to talk to pupils and look at their work. I also scrutinised information on pupils' attainment and achievement over time and the school's records of its monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching.

Context

The number of pupils on roll has been falling for some time but this has now stabilised. Governors are at an advanced stage of identifying an appropriate multi-academy trust for Poltair School to join.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the areas the school needs to work on in order to improve further the quality of education it provides. There are clear plans for how this will be done and governors provide a good balance of support and challenge to make certain that these plans are put into effect successfully.

Senior and middle leaders are monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement more effectively than previously. Nonetheless, they need to ensure that this process is always focused on assessing the impact that teaching has on pupils' progress over time.

The school's leaders have worked well to build on the existing good practice in humanities to improve the quality of education provided across the school. Along with other senior leaders, the head of humanities, recently promoted to the senior team, has been instrumental in driving forward many of the improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, the effective way in which humanities teachers prepare the most able pupils to get the highest grades at GCSE has been shared well. Teachers of other subjects in the school have benefited from focused training that shares this good practice. The emphasis across the school on the development of extended writing is improving pupils' achievement in a number of subjects, particularly science and physical education.

Teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and set challenging targets for all of them. Teachers pose questions which assess, probe and deepen pupils' understanding well. Time is used productively in lessons and pupils' engagement and interest in their learning was a noticeable feature of the inspection. Teachers are now using the school's revised marking and feedback policy more consistently and, thus, more effectively. Pupils are now given time to

reflect on what they do well and what they need to do to improve. As a consequence of these improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils are making better progress than in the past.

The progress of disadvantaged pupils (those who are eligible for pupil premium funding) is improving. The gap between their achievement and that of other pupils with similar starting points nationally is closing. It is still too wide, however, and the school recognises that more work needs to be done in order for this gap to close more rapidly. Examination of pupils' work shows that some disadvantaged boys are not making as rapid progress as disadvantaged girls with similar starting points.

External support

The school has received effective support in improving the quality of teaching from the Peninsula Teaching School Partnership. The school has also used professional networks established by the Cornwall Association of Secondary Heads to develop further its leadership and management capacity. The local authority has also conducted two visits to the school to assess the speed of improvement and these have proved useful in focusing work on the key areas that need to improve.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee
Her Majesty's Inspector