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Mr John Simon
Principal
Dawlish Community College
Elm Grove Road
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Dear Mr Simon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Dawlish Community College

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 2017, 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 December 2016. 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 for the school to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, four members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority. We discussed actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Accompanied by your vice-principal, I observed pupils learning in lessons and pupils' behaviour and held two meetings with pupils from different year groups. I scrutinised books from a number of subjects and year groups with you. I met with members of staff with specific responsibility for safeguarding and reviewed child protection records.

Context

Since the inspection in December 2016, you have restructured the leadership team, ensuring that each member has a clear understanding of their role. You have also made changes to the timings of the school day. You have employed a specialist teacher to focus specifically on the lowest attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8. The total number of staff has been reduced as pupil numbers fall. The number of pupils who attend alternative provision has reduced significantly. The governing body has remained stable throughout this period.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have identified the priorities for improvement and implemented plans to bring these about. Although these are accurate, the pace of change has been too slow and needs to accelerate quickly in the coming months. Leaders and governors have spent much time since the previous inspection restructuring the staffing. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning has not improved as quickly as it needs to. Staff have embraced the changes so far and show a willingness to improve further.

Governors have been too accepting in the past. They recognise that they need to hold leaders far more to account, with timely action plans and milestones by which they can measure impact on a more regular basis. Expectations of what should be achieved, in order for the school to be good or better, need to be raised further and be more rapid.

Leaders introduced a new assessment system earlier this year. This ensures that teachers assess pupils' knowledge and understanding at the start of each topic. They assess their understanding throughout the topic and evaluate what pupils know, understand and can do when it is completed. As a result, teachers are better informed when planning learning activities for pupils. This system has been implemented in almost all subjects across the school and is resulting in improvement. The adaptation of teaching during lessons is less well developed.

Leaders have rightly prioritised the progress of the most able pupils. This group of pupils are eager to do well. Owing to the effective work of leaders and staff to ensure that pupils are ready to learn, pupils relish the opportunity to attempt ever more challenging work. Their work and school assessment information show that a higher proportion of pupils are working at the highest grades.

Leaders' focus on improving pupils' attitudes to learning has had much success. Staff now have much higher expectations of pupils' behaviour, but there is scope for much more, for example in improving the quality of pupils' presentation of work.

Teaching is often too mechanical in its nature and the opportunities for pupils to

apply their learning are too limited. Teaching provides pupils with the breadth of knowledge set out in the curriculum. However, teaching does not fully equip pupils to work at increasing the depth of their understanding, including their ability to link different aspects and concepts studied in many subjects.

Variation persists within subjects and across departments, particularly with respect to the level of challenge, the quality of presentation of work and the completion of tasks. Writing skills have improved, but again, in subjects across the school other than English, inconsistency remains. Often spelling and punctuation errors go unchecked and pupils do not routinely ensure that all tasks that have been set are fully completed.

The achievement of disadvantaged pupils has risen sharply. Governors commissioned an independent pupil premium review shortly after the previous inspection and have used its findings to drive improvements. Leaders have identified the barriers that individuals face and have matched these to strategies that support pupils in overcoming their barriers. Leaders ensure that teachers take these strategies into account when planning learning. As a result, in some subjects, disadvantaged pupils now achieve more highly than their classmates.

The support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is now more balanced. Pupils continue to receive the social and emotional support they need. The content of pupils' individual education plans is increasingly taken into account in teachers' planning. Consequently, teachers show that they are progressively using strategies to improve teaching for these pupils. As teachers take more account of pupils' needs when planning learning, pupils' progress is rising.

Safeguarding is effective. Records and risk assessments are well maintained and are complete. The school is proactive in identifying pupils who are at risk, works well with other agencies to ensure pupils' safety, and reacts quickly when needed.

External support

The local authority has provided leadership support to the school and teachers continue to access training from the Dartmoor Teaching School Alliance. However, the programme of support has lacked the cohesive focus that is needed and has overly concentrated on the evaluation of progress since the previous inspection. There is now an urgent need for leaders, governors and the local authority to identify a partner, or partners, to focus more readily on improving teaching, learning and assessment rather than evaluating a lack of impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector