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Mrs Honor Byford
Headteacher
Ryburn Valley High School
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Dear Mrs Byford

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Ryburn Valley High School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 3 October 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

There have been no major changes to the school's situation since the previous inspection. A temporary appointment of an additional assistant headteacher has been made for this academic year in order to increase the school's leadership capacity.

As a result of the inspection in February 2012, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

This year there was a marked improvement in examination results at the end of Key Stage 4 and for sixth form students. The 2012 unvalidated GCSE results show that the proportion of students gaining at least five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, is above average. There was a sharp increase in performance in both English and mathematics, with the percentage of students gaining at least a grade C in mathematics rising to above average. The percentage of students gaining a good GCSE pass rose in almost all subjects. Almost a quarter of the students achieved five or more passes at A* and A grades. However, improvements were not uniform: girls' performance improved substantially whereas outcomes for boys were similar to those of 2011. The proportion of students making the expected rate of progress increased markedly in both English and mathematics, reaching national average in mathematics. About a quarter of students made above average rates of progress in these subjects. Results at A level also improved sharply in 2012 with a rise in the proportion of students gaining the top grades. Students at both A and AS level made good progress.

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

A strong sense of shared responsibility, collaboration and determination to bring about improvement permeates the school's work. The headteacher and senior leaders have strengthened existing systems for monitoring both students' progress and the quality of provision so that these are more coherent and rigorous. The presentation and use of assessment information has been streamlined, enhancing the regular reviews of students' progress including those which focus sharply on underachievers. The role and skills of middle leaders have been developed, both through tailored in-house training and participation in national professional programmes. Together with senior staff, middle leaders are fully involved in termly monitoring activities and, through regular meetings, are held to account for students' learning in their subjects. There is a greater focus on the responsibility all staff have for students' learning, as is evident in the use of department meetings to discuss good practice rather than administrative matters.

Since the inspection, a closer connection has been made between the strengths and weaknesses identified through lesson observations and the training provided for staff. Consequently, training is increasingly well targeted and there are more structured opportunities for good practice to be shared, for instance, through coaching. Drawing on the school's media arts specialism, a staff group has been formed to look at creative ways of developing and delivering training. This has already led to some imaginative training events, and staff commented on the growing depth of professional dialogue which these have prompted. The school's own analysis indicates the positive impact of these various strategies in the growing number of lessons that are good or better. During this inspection, the benefits were evident in a number of lessons observed, although it is clear that some teaching continues to require improvement.

The better lessons observed were characterised by a brisk pace and high levels of challenge, particularly for higher-attaining students. Expositions were clear and effective questioning enabled teachers to evaluate students' learning and redirect lessons accordingly. A variety of well-timed tasks helped students to sustain their interest and concentration: they worked well in pairs and groups. Good relationships have fostered students' confidence in evaluating their own work and asking for support. Students responded very positively to teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm, behaving well and following instructions promptly. Learning was less effective in lessons where the pace was either too slow, so limiting the opportunities for students to complete tasks, or too fast so that students had little chance to develop or consolidate their understanding. In such lessons, too little attention was paid to the work students were completing in class and questioning was not probing enough to identify misconceptions.

The local authority's statement of action and action plan were judged fit for purpose. Last term the local authority was in a position to support the school through the work of consultants in mathematics and science: this is no longer the case. The school is drawing effectively on the expertise of partner schools, for instance, in the improvement of teaching. The school's improvement partner is making a valued and well-targeted contribution, for instance, through the training of middle leaders.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in English and mathematics, thereby enabling students to make good progress, by ensuring that all teachers use assessment information to plan lessons that are sufficiently challenging and meet the needs, abilities and interests of the students.

- Embed current leadership initiatives to sustain improvement to the quality of teaching by:
 - developing the skills of middle leaders and sharing existing good practice across departments at this level of leadership
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels monitor and evaluate more rigorously the impact of actions taken to raise attainment and improve the teaching across the school.