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31 January 2014

Mr S Tong
Headteacher
Poltair School
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Dear Mr Tong

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Poltair School

Following my visit to your school on 31 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 2013. 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. The school should take further action to:

- ensure the improvement plan has clear measurable milestones to check on the progress being made towards the targets set.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, leaders with responsibility for mathematics and English, students, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, during which the action taken since the last inspection was discussed. There were also a number of short visits to lessons. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

There have been no significant staffing changes at senior level since the school's previous inspection, although one senior leader's role is being covered by other leaders due to their absence.

Main findings

You have made a very good start in addressing the areas for improvement identified at your recent inspection. Expectations have been raised with regards to the quality of teaching and ensuring that leaders with responsibilities for subjects (heads of faculty) are leading improvements within their subject.

Data on students' current progress is collected half-termly. Each head of faculty presents a thorough overview of the information to senior leaders each term. Heads of faculty scrutinise work in books and discuss students' progress with their department teachers to ensure they have a clear overview of students' progress. Teachers produce an intervention plan aimed at enabling any underachieving students to remain on track to meet their targets. Senior leaders monitor these plans with the respective heads of faculties. This system is ensuring a rigorous approach to the monitoring of students' achievement and is also ensuring that individual teachers and heads of faculty are being routinely held to account for the students they teach.

Improving the quality of teaching is, rightly, your main focus. You recognise that ensuring teaching is consistently good and better as fundamental in moving the school to become good. Senior leaders monitor teachers through formal lessons observation, scrutiny of students' work, short visits to lessons and by monitoring the progress students make. This is enabling the school to have a clear idea about the strengths and areas for improvement of individual teachers. A coaching scheme has been implemented for teachers who are not yet deemed to be delivering consistently good lessons. These teachers are working alongside the most effective practitioners at the school to develop and improve their teaching. This programme includes the setting of clear improvement targets, joint observations with the coach, team teaching and time to reflect on their practice. There is evidence that this approach is beginning to have a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching.

Members of the governing body have a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school and key areas for improvement. They are providing effective support and appropriate challenge to ensure the rate of improvement accelerates. Governors are linked to each department and have begun to carry out short visits to lessons with senior leaders to monitor the quality of teaching and the impact of departmental improvement plans. The school improvement plan identifies key areas for development. It sets appropriately challenging targets. It does not, however, include regular milestones to check and ensure that these targets are being met at the assessment points set throughout the year.

During my meeting with students and from my short visits to observe lessons, it is clear that students exhibit very positive attitudes about what they are learning. The school's current achievement data indicates that students' progress is beginning to accelerate.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You are beginning to work alongside local schools to develop cross-school improvement activities although these discussions are still at a relatively early stage. The local authority has brokered support from a headteacher to assist school improvement. Even though at an early stage this strategy is providing helpful human resources support.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cornwall.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector