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Mrs Sharon Marshall
Headteacher
The Ilfracombe Church of England Academy
Worth Road
Ilfracombe
EX34 9JB

Dear Mrs Marshall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Ilfracombe Church of England Academy

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 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. The academy should take further action to:

- embed the new curriculum changes in mathematics so that mathematics teaching better meets the needs of all students regardless of their background, ability or starting point
- ensure, through rigorous and routine monitoring, that the agreed characteristics of high quality teaching, assessment and feedback are secure and visible in all subjects
- ensure that actions taken to improve the academy are measured against clearly defined success criteria enabling governors to better evaluate the impact of planned actions and hold academy leaders to account.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and four members of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the sponsor. I evaluated the academy's improvement plan and post Ofsted action plan, together with other documentation including governing body minutes. Documentation relating to the monitoring of teaching, the training programme for teachers and the management of their performance was also discussed. I visited a number of lessons jointly with one of your Deputy Headteachers and I also looked at a sample of students' books.

Context

Since the previous inspection the current second in department for mathematics has been appointed as the new Head of Mathematics from September 2015. Good transition arrangements are in place to ensure that the change in leadership is effectively managed.

Main findings

You have made excellent use of the recommendations from the section 5 inspection to raise expectations of staff so that all are clear about their role in improving the achievement of all students. Your senior team, staff and governors are determined and ambitious to improve performance quickly. All know that the quality of teaching in mathematics and the achievement of disadvantaged students is too inconsistent and needs to show sustained improvement if the academy is to be judged as good at its next inspection. As a result, procedures to track the progress that different groups of students make within subjects and across the academy have been significantly strengthened. Staff know they are accountable for the progress their students make irrespective of students' background, ability or starting point. This is reflected in your improvement plans which set out clearly what needs to be done. While they are regularly reviewed the evaluation of each action is not linked precisely enough to the progress that students are making over time. This makes it more difficult for you and governors to evaluate clearly the impact of action taken and adjust your work quickly when progress starts to falter.

The careful consideration given by senior leaders to the individual training and development needs of staff is resulting in clear improvement to the quality of teaching and subject leadership. This 'can do' approach is underpinned by the development of a 'thirst for learning' in those who work and study here. Training for middle leaders is helping them swiftly improve their subject. Paired observations of lessons is resulting in a greater depth of professional dialogue between staff about students' learning and how best to create the conditions for it to flourish. You are using the development of 'coaching conversations' to support and challenge teachers

to reflect on the quality of their work and then re-shape lesson activities in the light of the feedback they are given.

The establishment of a set of 'non-negotiables' by involving all staff in the development of the academy's 'Recipe for Great Teaching' has been instrumental in setting out your expectations of good teaching. It was clear from my visits to lessons and scrutiny of students' work that teachers were incorporating these shared ideas into their teaching. However, too much variation within and across subjects still exists and you recognise that these 'non-negotiables' now need to be fully embedded across the academy if students are to achieve in line with their capabilities. For example, despite the good start you have made to raise standards in mathematics not all teachers demonstrate a clear understanding of the latest curriculum changes and how these can best be used to extend, develop or reinforce students' learning.

Governors are ambitious for the academy and have strengthened their understanding of performance data in order to hold senior and middle leaders to account so that weaknesses are tackled swiftly. Discussions with governors and a scrutiny of the latest minutes of the governor monitoring group demonstrate a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for development. Governors understand their important role in routinely challenging academy leaders for clear evidence of the impact of planned actions and the difference each has made to students. They have brokered an external review of governance and of the use of the pupil premium to further develop the impact of their work across the academy. The reviews are due to take place in July 2015.

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

External support

The sponsor has brokered an external company to develop the quality of middle leadership across the academy. The development of 'coaching conversations' and a greater confidence to take action where performance needs to be improved is beginning to secure better quality of teaching across the subjects. The sponsor is working well with the governing body to develop a more effective model of governance. As a result, governors are now better placed to scrutinise and challenge the academy's work.

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

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector