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13 July 2013

Mrs Pat Russell
Principal
Pensby High School for Boys
Irby Road
Heswall
Wirral
Merseyside
CH61 6XN

Dear Mrs Russell

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Pensby High School for Boys

Following my visit to your school on 12 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

This visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal of the federation and the Head of School, the Chair and another member of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Context

The new Principal has been in post since 1 December 2011. She had previously been the headteacher of Pensby High School for Girls, which is now part of a federation with Pensby High School for Boys. This federation was in response to falling rolls in the catchment area and a desire to serve the educational needs of the community as

effectively as possible. Since the section 5 inspection, there has been no change in the number of teaching staff in the school planned to be in post in September 2013. There have been some changes in roles and responsibilities of middle leaders and the teaching staff.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school's senior leaders have responded positively to the inspection report. Discussions in the school prior to the inspection had led senior leaders and governors to be aware of areas of improvement needed. The findings of the Ofsted inspection report have reinforced and catalysed the efforts being made by school leaders to bring about improvement.

The school's response, as seen in the action plan, has a close focus on the points for improvement given in the report. The planning systematically addresses these issues and includes a more rigorous approach to monitoring than was seen previously. This action planning has been carried out collaboratively with the local authority. There is a clear focus on sharing good practice and increasing the monitoring of provision. The latter involves increased frequency and rigour of classroom observations and, in addition, a more systematic approach to work scrutiny and gathering students' views on teaching and learning. Teachers categorised as 'below the line', that is to say not graded as good or outstanding, are identified for support through a combination of generic and bespoke training.

After the inspection, subject leadership has been scrutinised, particularly in English and science, two subject areas cited in the report as needing to improve the overall quality of teaching. In order to support improvement, the school has identified and engaged external sources of support. The senior leaders have required an improvement planning response for science, English and literacy. Changes of staffing have been targeted at bringing about improvement, such as the appointment of a literacy leader to work in support of literacy across the curriculum under the management of the literacy coordinator. A further effort to bring about consistency across the curriculum involves a new marking policy for which all staff have been trained. The implementation of this policy will be checked through the improved monitoring system.

The local authority has deployed officers to work with the school in formulating the school action plan and its own statement of action. These two documents reflect the effective collaborative nature of the relationship. After the Ofsted inspection, there has been a series of meetings involving local authority officers, senior leaders in the school and the Chair of the Governing Body, which has resulted in coherent action. The local authority continues to consider the school as one causing concern and it holds monthly meetings of key personnel that have an interest in bringing about improvement. The local authority's planning for support is rational, with clear responsibilities, budgeted for and associated with a time frame for individual actions.

It is clear that the governing body is taking its responsibility of support and challenge seriously. Governors are taking a look at the governing body's own structure and roles to match the challenges cited in the action plan, in the creation of which they played their part. They have begun to appoint governors as links to departments and are writing a role description that should result in governors making consistent contributions to improvement. They envisage governors being involved in departmental meetings, monitoring of performance and carrying out classroom visits in collaboration with school leaders. They are considering writing their own plan of action to articulate how they can best support and challenge the senior leaders.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service for the Wirral.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Richardson
Additional Inspector