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Mrs Dawn Farrent
Headteacher
Lostock College
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Dear Mrs Farrent

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lostock College, Trafford

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking incisive and urgent action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Refine the post-inspection action plan so that it is more sharply focused on securing rapid improvement in standards in English

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The action plan was evaluated. I also met with heads of department, looked at students' books and examined documentation on students' current attainment, progress and attendance.

Context

Since the previous inspection the leadership team has been restructured and two newly qualified teachers have been appointed, one in English and one in science.

Main findings

School leaders have not let the dust settle on the previous inspection report. They have attacked with vigour and conviction the areas of improvement identified by the inspection team. Since the inspection, staff have been heartened by an improvement in the examination results in 2013; for example, the proportion of students who gained a GCSE at grades A* - C in mathematics has risen substantially since 2012. This has uplifted morale and all members of the school community appear united in their determination to improve their school further.

School leaders have drawn up an action plan that provides clear direction in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. However, it is not yet focused sufficiently on driving rapid improvements in English. Poor progress in English remains a stumbling block to Lostock College becoming a good school quickly.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a major reshuffle in leadership responsibilities. Teachers are much clearer regarding the role they have to play in making sure all students do as well as they should. An improved system to collect information on students' progress has been introduced. 'Learning leaders' and 'progress leaders' use this system to spot underperformance with much more urgency than in the past. They challenge staff if students fall behind. Teachers know that they have to step in to make sure students get back on track. This information is therefore driving improvements in the classroom, at the same time as helping school leaders to know exactly how well, or how badly, all groups of students are doing. As a result, the school is now in a much better position to close the gaps in achievement for boys and for students eligible for the pupil premium.

The appointment of two newly qualified teachers in English and science has brought fresh ideas and strengthened subject knowledge in both departments. Students can now be taught in smaller groups. This helps teachers to plan lessons that are better suited to the needs and abilities of individual students. This increase in staffing has also enabled the school to provide more targeted support and one-to-one tuition where required.

There has been a concerted drive to improve the quality of teaching. Since the inspection a very extensive programme of staff training has been rolled out. Staff have shown admirable commitment by dedicating a considerable amount of time to their own professional development. Judging from the school's evidence, this is already appearing to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching. For example, all teachers are now expected to include in their lessons strategies that will help to support students' literacy and numeracy skills; this was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Students spoke enthusiastically of how lessons have improved; for example, as one student commented: 'Work has got harder...we never have to sit there and wait! There are no breaks in lessons now...teachers are challenging us more, there is a steady pace and less chat!'

Teachers have noticed how arrangements to check on their performance have been much tighter since the inspection. Subject leaders have had training on how to review the work of their department and are expected to produce an action plan for improvement in their area of responsibility. Every teacher now has to record their lessons in a lesson planner. Discussions with teachers and subject leaders are highly focused on assessing the impact of the actions they are taking to improve students' achievement.

Governors were disappointed at the findings of the inspection team but this has not deterred them from taking decisive action to tackle identified weaknesses in governance. The Governing Body has enlisted in training run by the local authority. Governors are also exploring links with the National College for Teaching and Leadership in order to improve their capacity to support and challenge the school more effectively.

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

Local authority support has been effective in improving attendance and behaviour. The recent relocation onto school premises of the 'English as an additional language' support team is a move in the right direction; this development has the potential to provide a much-needed resource to help the increasing proportion of Lostock students who enter the school with weak skills in English. However, local authority support has not been sufficiently focused on improving students' achievement overall. The school has brokered beneficial links with a range of good and outstanding local schools. For example, the partnership with Altrincham Grammar School for Girls is providing opportunities for internships for Lostock students. This scheme is helping to raise students' aspirations and has, in some instances, led to employment.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy